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Cold Steel

The Novels of

M. P. SHIEL

Now Ready

THE PURPLE CLOUD

THE YELLOW PERIL

THE LORD OF THE SEA

COLD STEEL

In Preparation

THE WEIRD O' IT

THE LAST MIRACLE

THE ISLE OF LIES

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

etc., etc.

The Novels of

M. P. SHIEL

COLD STEEL

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CHAPTER I

THE FORDS

Yet they live again in the dreamer's brain,
As deeds of love and wrong
Which pass with a sigh, and seem to die,
Survive in the poet's song. *Barry Cornwall.*

Historians have not been too lucky in noting the things of most moment in history : of the Battle of the Spurs we know, but not of Luther's youth, nor of that person and purpose of Bessie Ford, who was like pebbles hurled into lakes, about which circles work out and flow away ; only, in her case, instead of the waves fading as they widened, they still acquired height, filled a sea, until at the horizon they ribbed out in billows hill-high.

We may state at once that the main-spring of her life lay in a sister, *called* Laura Ford, although her name was more likely Garcia or Gomez : for once, Bessie being then three years old, a pageant of Spanish noblemen came on a visit to my Lord Bishop of Winchester : and to the Episcopal Palace Bessie's mother, then a widow, would go with eggs to sell.

And so (as we think) it came to be that, whereas Bessie Ford was a little person ordinary enough in appearance, her gorgeous Laura, four years younger, was a girl of passionate world-loveliness, Spanish in type.

And for Laura there was war—conflicts all but incredible, except to the few of us who have beheld a beauty, and so can comprehend that for a face " sacred Troy " fell, and " many souls of heroes reeled down to Hades "—beauties being rarer and stranger than Boodahs or Newtons, and the messages from galaxy and farthest star that her glances half-reveal, half-conceal, are distracting like the gadfly,

and men's worship of her is a yearning and home-sickness in their souls for the Eternal, of which she is the Word.

Now, before anyone of any importance had beheld the beauty, Bessie came to London at the invitation of mine host of The Bell in Eastcheap, her mother's uncle, bringing her Laura, then some seventeen years, half-a-head taller than Bess, looking in her heeled cordovans like a young tree in Spring sprung from the hill-side. And Bessie loved Laura ; and still lived in a tremble of terror for Laura.

Bessie was slim and quick, with an erect neck, her hair nut-brown, combed flat from a broad brow, below this dome being a rather small triangle of face, very gracefully lined, her eyes grave, small, with hardly any eyebrow, set far apart in the head one from the other.

By her labours at the inn she was able to keep Laura living in a lodging near the Whitefriars ; and since Laura would not absolutely be made a nun, all Bessie's thoughts were of the " abominations of Babylon " (one of her great-grandfathers and one of her grandfathers had been saints of " the Lollards ", and her father a quirister in Winchester Cathedral).

There was one name at which, above all other names, she started—the name of Henry, the King : for already the fame of Henry VIII as dragon-gallant and Blue Beard had spread through England.

Beside which high terror she had a hundred others ; and would listen to the love-adventures related in the inn, if she might catch that name of Laura : for it was an age of love.

She had not been two months in London when, already, she knew that Laura had a lover.

This one, however, did not rouse in her any terror : she had looked into his face and seen it gentle ; his name Bonner : but he was young in his nonage and poor, and her dream for Laura was—Marriage.

Bonner was a " scholar ", the future holding in it for him this vision of bliss—the Bachelauriat of Arts, he attending

classes at the new Paul's School of Master Colet in a threadbare sarcenet doublet, in divers ways eking out a livelihood, hanging frequently about the courtyards of my Lord Cardinal, and running errands—a very spiritual face on a lank frame, his forehead widening as it went up, the chin lengthening down into a quaint point, the thin lips scarlet ; and his eyes were large and luminous, and swam in melancholy.

He had begun with Laura by gliding along an alley in the Whitefriars, and glancing at a casement, across which anon a face under a labyrinth of black hair would move with a musing slowness ; then he had bought a new velvet bonnet at a frippery-store with his last angel, and begun to pass and repass the Whitefriars, shot to the reins.

And Laura from her small-paned window could see all this.

CHAPTER II

THE HEART-CRY

> Sorrow with Sorrow sighing, hope with hope
> Exulting, heart embracing heart entire. *Pollok.*

Before the second month Laura had begun to pout—such a pout ! for she had on her upper lip a downy growth which added a gashing something of humanity to her divinity, and when she pouted this hint of a moustache made her thick pale-rose mouth a tit-bit, provoking boundless appetite.

She pouted, and began to steal out in promenades to the top of the next bye-way, and back : of all which she said not a word to Bessie.

Once Mark Bonner saw her picking her steps in the mud of the street, but could not address her : his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth ; and, as he brushed by with a hung head, she saw the trembling of his wan hand.

The next day she received a love-poem with the last line of each verse in Latin ; and a week later a jolly Augustinian who came to collect Abbey-dues (for the house was within the manor of the Hospital of St. Barts), told her with a fillip that the meaning of " Te dulcem meam amo " was this : " I love thee my sweet one ".

And twice more they carefully met, and hastily passed ; but the third time the girl, with cold hands, chuckled a challenging giggle to herself ; and Mark stopped, hesitated, turned, and whispered to her through a throat so parched, that his words were lost.

However, he walked by her, and when they parted uncovered to lay his lips on her hand.

Rising and looking from her window in the dead of

night, she saw him standing there below ; and the candle-lamp of the alley glared on his up-gazing face.

After that they met daily, within these two now breathing that thing that from the seed brings forth the tree ; and suddenly it was as though a sun blinded their eyes.

" How lovely you are ! "

" You also ", she replied—though at this time they did not know each other's name.

From the Fleet down to Westminster—mostly open field and tree-land, varied by the palaces of my Lords Essex, Arundel, Somerset—they walked, as night fell, and hardly a hay-cart drawled in sight ; or they halted by the water-side, or breathed their secret beneath bowers of the grandees' grounds.

And he : " Faith, here is the thought which gives me pause—if I had never seen you ! "

" What would you have done ? "

" I should even have died ! "

" What, you love me so, sir ? "

" Stars, bear witness ! "

" And always—from the very first sight you had of me—I knew that it was so with you ".

" From the first sight—and before ! "

" What, before ? "

" Oh, I have known you . . . ! When a boy I once saw your eyes in a brook in a wood ; I have guessed you in my reading of Helen the Greek ; I have foreseen you in dreams. . . . "

She pushed up her pale mouth's pout to his ; then : " But my sister !—Our Saviour, she will know ! "

" Is she gentle and good ? "

" Oh, she is very good, my sister. But——"

" You must tell her ".

" Our Saviour ! You think I dare ? "

" Let *me* ".

" Is it that we will be married ? "

" Why, my pig's-eye—yes ".

" When ?

" Ah, when ! I lack substance ! When the wind shall fill my sail ! I have twice attracted the Cardinal's eye, and he is the patron of poor scholars. But to me even poverty were heaven with you ".

" I don't like poverty, I. Have you seen the inside of a palace ? I have, at Winchester. Oh, the mighty mansion-house, the menials, and the majesty ! Had I that, and you also, then were I happy ! "

They rose to roam homeward, and on the morrow Bonner was at The Bell to tell his tale ; but under the still eyes of Bessie Ford he had a sense of criticism and chill reception.

CHAPTER III

"CROM ABOO!"

There came a certain lord . . . *Shakespear.*

From the street, paved with "pavers" and grass-grown, one descended into The Bell by three steps to a room so sombre, that for a time the eye fumbled : a room full of uproar at three one afternoon when a horseman came eastward—one who, though he had been in London five weeks, and each day had made The Bell his haunt, hesitated to enter this day, went past the post that bore a black bell painted on a red board before the four gables of the tavern.

For he had in his holster two letters, one to the Governor of the Tower, one to my Lord Wolsey, both written by the King's own hand—the latter containing State-secrets of supreme importance ; but after going past the tavern, he turned again to the turmoil of mirth that noised out to him—a man standing six feet above his spurs, his russet-leather jerkin covering a heroic breadth of breast, a broad-sword hanging at his buff-belt, on the other side a pair of pistols and a dudgeon-dagger ; and now on his face was a smile, a face wide as Jove's, shaven, with humour in the mood of the mouth, and phrenological bosses about a forehead quite white, though the expanse of face was ruddy, tanned, crossed with hacks : for Garrett Oge Fitzgerald had been in the wars.

He was a bastard son of a bastard branch of the great Geraldines of Kildare, his great-half-uncle being even then the King's Deputy at Dublin : yet Garrett Oge was the possessor of one only harry-noble in his pouch.

Calling now "Hi!", he threw his reins to a hostler, and, as he sauntered with his laggard swagger into the parlour,

waved his arm round to cry out " *Crom aboo !* "—war-cry of the Geraldines.

He was received by a shout of welcome, and a lifting of the six-hooped pots ; but he, in the midst of that uproar, touched with his finger the slit in the murrey taffeta lining of his riding-cloak, to assure himself that his letters were there, having taken the precaution to remove them from his holster to his person—though not a cautious man.

He cried above the din : " A stoup of your canaries, mine host ! Who's for drinking with me the King's health ? Ah, little wench "—touching Bessie Ford under the chin—unsuspicious still—such are the secrecies of the heart—that between that little Bess and his big self subsisted some affinity, some mutualness of terror and longing, hope and love—perhaps an affinity between two Valours ; unsuspected by *him*, but not, maybe, by Bessie, who, bearing the tankards, would chuckle clandestinely at his jokes and boasts ; and " he *is* a one ", she'd say.

" King's health ? " cried a mercer of London Bridge : " adding two and two to make four, one would aver that Master Fitzgerald has even won his entry into the King's service at the last ".

" Uds daggers, my master, the King has won his entry into the service of Master Fitzgerald ! "

So said Fitzgerald, and the laugh was hearty, all being now happy, having in their midst a tongue that bred merriment ; and the laugh was not over when a voice was saying close to Fitzgerald in the tone of friendship : " What, Fitz ? "

" What, Mac, my ingle ?—beshrew me, I noted thee not before ! "

" Is it so with thee ? Is it true ? "

" About the King ? Aye, true as clary is bright ".

" Fitz, I congratulate thee ".

" Congratulate the King, Mac ".

" Both, Fitz. But tell me the manner o't, lad. How did the King take to an unthrift like thyself ? "

" Well, it was on this wise ", said Garrett Oge Fitzgerald to the revellers : " for four weeks, as you wot, I have been loitering at the levée-time in the ante-chamber at Westminster ; but never a chance had poor Fitz in the going and coming, and that shoulder-rubbing of dukes, Corinthians, and gallants—Oh, 'tis a brave show there o'mornings, my masters—ambassadors, princes, courtiers—French and Spaniard, doublets pinked with Venice gold, inlaid foils. And says Fitz to himself : ' How through all this shall a poor soldier-of-fortune arrive at the King's eyes to show his proportions ? ' So I dallied from day to day, till Wednesday morning a lord with lackeys comes sauntering through, and what name should I hear announced but my very own—' Garrett Oge Fitzgerald '—my great uncle ! If, now, I thought, I can get that name sent in on my own count, all's well. So next morning, with a high head, I gave that name to a myrmidon ; but he eyed my apparel scorningly, nor called my name, while many another came and went. So I, at the last, was slouching down the staircase, when into the courtyard came a lady, clad in black. I was not such a chuff as not to see in her the Queen, and she had no sooner put her brodequin from her coach than I was there to her assisting. ' Would you see the King, madam ? ' said I. ' And who are you, sir ? ' says she. ' Garrett Oge Fitzgerald, madam ', said I. So she bowed and smiled, leaned on my arm, and in one minute the Queen and Oge Fitzgerald were cried together. The King was walking to and fro, hands behind, till, at a turn, ' Ha, Coz ! ' cries he, ' how goes the morning with you ? But this is—Ha, Sirrah ! who the pestilence art thou ? ' ' Garrett Oge Fitzgerald, your Grace ', said I—and gallant is he, the King, when he puts on anger, massive, cocking one elegant leg afore, and a way of twisting his lips aside, and gnawing the pout at a corner. So he contemplated me then, now gnawing his wry-pushed lips, now drawing-in a moustache-end with his tongue to gnaw, meditating upon me, angry : and very chill and threating is the regard of

his eye, and severe, and hard to bear without a pallor, my masters all. And he says, ' So, cullion ', says he, ' thou would'st mock at me ? What is thy name ? ' ' Garrett Oge Fitzgerald ', said I. ' Ha ! again thou liest : hi, there, Guards . . . ! ' Well, before I was fluttery, but now cool as a gaze-hound's nose at the near danger ; and, as three minions ran in with swords, I spoke : ' Your Grace is really astray, for that is my name in baptism. 'Tis true the Lord of Kildare claims my identical name, but the Queen here will bear me out—she straightway scented me real and only Fitzgerald, Sire '. No sooner said, than back went the King's head with a cry of laughter : for the Queen, methinks, is no longer favourite there, and her foreign mistakes become food for mockery. That laugh saved me ; and when the King had talked with her awhile, he turns again to me, and says he : ' Thou hast served in the wars, methinks ? ' ' In the Low Countries ', said I, ' and in Ireland '. ' Art thou leal and trusty ? ' ' Try me ', ko I. And so, my masters, was it that I come to have here in my cloak two letters—one to my Lord Wolsey, one to the Tower—writ by the King's own hand, for already he hath in Fitz the confidence of old friendship. A right royal personage is he—do me right, my masters all—and here's to him ! "

" But thy tongue, thy tongue, Fitz, runs too furiously fast ", Macdonald murmured to him ; " Gad-a-mercy, man ! hast thou no inkling of prudence ? "

CHAPTER IV

THE FATAL ACT

Great God ! what perils do environ
The man who meddles with cold iron ! "*Hudibras*".

Te, soror, nunquam volo esse securam, sed temere, semperque tuam fragilitatem habere suspectam. *St. Augustine.*

Macdonald was a fellow built on a smaller scale, knit, quick, yet weighty-looking, between the parting of the moustache his lip pressing like strength itself, the narrowed eye glinting with a gimlet sagacity within its lids : a fellow neat, and wary, and canny, a Scot, who had fought both at Guinnegate and Flodden, and was a Wolsey-man ; whose eyes saw many things ; and, as Fitz spoke about the King's letters, had noticed the start, and the advance toward the table, of a man who, he saw, was a foreigner—a man muffled in a sombre mantle under the bonnet of a hidalgo, all in black and silver—a silver buckle, brooch, a silver hilt to his rapier—and what one saw of his classic profile proved him Spanish.

" Tush ", said Fitz to Mac, " care killed a cat : the King knows to whom to trust his letters. . . . I say, my masters, 'tis whispered among the Guards that the King is in love again ".

" By my sooth ", said a butcher from the Cheap, " 'tis he forty-fifth tale of kingly love within a month ! "

" Aye "—from Fitz—" a damsel and a half a day ".

" And who is the new love ? "

" A certain Mistress Anne Boleyn ".

" Oh, that is an oldish tale enough ", observed mine host.

" He hath fallen in love with her afresh, forgetting that e had done it afore ", said Fitz : " I heard the news as new ".

" New, quotha ! " cried a reeve of the Abbot of Paul's

" why, the fame of her hath long been known : she's the cream of dainty moppets ".

" Tush ! " said Fitz.

" You tush me ? Why, is she not known for the prettiest piece of femaledom in England ? "

" Tush, sir ", said Fitz.

And now Macdonald, with a twinkle in his eye : " Come, Fitz, 'tis clear thou hast been caught by a face, for thou hast a beam of prejudgment in thine eye : the lady Anne is indeed fair, for I have seen her ".

But the eyes of Fitz were fixed on a beam of the ceiling, full of tasty musings ; and he uttered this judgment slowly : " The King never saw a lovely wench ".

Whereupon a mug, dropped by Bessie Ford, broke upon the tiles, spilling costly wine of Aliçant.

" Come, my masters, Master Fitzgerald hath yet an adventure upon his tongue ! " cried out the mercer, and now Fitz took his eye from that black beam of the ceiling, and, smiting the table, cried : " She is the rarest, the gloriousest, the most gaudiest little perroquet that ever flashed from branch to branch ! "

" Who, then ? "

" Her name I tell not. Bah ! why not ?—name of Laura, then ".

" And you encountered her—where ? "

" The Whitefriars—hiddenest nook. Oh, 'tis the shrewdest minx ! coy, yet sly, showing impudent blushes, pouting compliances. She would speak, yet would not ; she would say 'No', and mean 'Yes'. Oh, 'tis the deepest piece of purity ! "

Blanched now was that little face of Bessie, and the string of rowan-tree berries hung about her bare throat trembled at the haste of her heart. . . .

" And what is thy plan, Fitz ? " asked Macdonald : " wilt thou—— ? "

" I never make a plan, Mac, till I am in the carrying out thereof. . . . Ha ! 'twas in an alley : there her pretty ankles tripped, and ' Mamsel ', ko I, ' sure, for a lock of that

hair I would carry you all your journey in my arms'. And she : ' 'Tis in vain, sir, to waste your time, for I have a gallant which I love, and a sister which I fear'. ' Uds daggers, mamsel', I riposted, ' that knot were easy cut : for the gallant which you love shall marry the sister which you fear, and you, rid of both, shall marry me'. She laughed at this, and, ' Our Saviour, 'tis a witty solution, sir', ko she, ' and a most hasty proposition'. ' Mamsel', I said, ' I am a Fitzgerald of Kildare'. ' I suppose 'tis a noble family, sir, with mansions and demesnes? . . . Still, 'tis useless : I know one which, though poor, I prefer to all your quarterings—though he be not so big and manful, I admit'. ' Do you affect a big and manful man, mamsel?' I asked. ' Well, sir, young maidens are pleased by such men', ko she. ' Then, here is one for you, mamsel!—this sounding breast, this broad brow, this sword, mamsel!' ' Our Saviour', ko she, with tittering, ' you retail your points like a frippery-man : yet I say not 'tis unhandsomely done'. ' Thou art the most temptingest morsel, mamsel', ko I, ' that goes uncooked in Europe'. ' Oh, *thou* me not, sir', she titters, ' for I am another's'. ' By blood and nails', said I, ' thou shalt be mine, mamsel'. ' Faith, sir', ko she, ' only by force could I be won by you'. ' Then, force it shall be', said I : ' where dost thou live?' ' That I will not tell', ko she—' 'tis true I pass here each day'. So I left, and then tracked her to her domicile : and this was the manner of our first courting".

" But how get her, Fitz?"—from Macdonald : " wilt thou be using force, thou gibbet-carrion?"

" Force, aye, and this night", Fitz answered.

At this time Bessie Ford stood leaning for support on one of the square posts ; but a power of will kept her from fainting ; and now she was conscious of a new tongue among the tongues : " Force, sir, say you?"—the tongue of the stranger in black-and-silver.

"Aye, sir, I said that", answered Fitz, glancing round and up.

" Bah ! this tale of the girl is a fantasy of your invention ".

Fitz's little eyes opened wide, looking about in wonder.

" Uds daggers, my masters ", he mentioned, " here is a gentleman who gives the lie to a Geraldine ".

Now Macdonald whispered low : " He seeks to pick a quarrel with thee ; answer him not, or fell him with thy fist ".

But Fitz took no notice. " You say that I lie, sir ? "—turning on his stool to face the stranger.

" Yes, you lie ".

" *Crom aboo !* "—springing up, a brand of red now on his brow, sword half drawn.

" Fitz, Fitz ", went Macdonald.

" But surely the gentleman is not in his serious earnest ? " said Fitz : " are you in your earnest, my master ? "

" You lie ".

" Then, by Christ's wrath, I scatter your brains ! "

But now mine host : " Hold ! all combats in the back-court, my masters, I pray you ", whereupon the stranger waved a courtly invitation toward the passage, and at once the roomful of fuddled men trooped in that direction—the tapster, hostler, too—Fitzgerald, on the way, flinging his cloak upon a table—out into a court paved with dislocated flags, a well-and-bucket, some hens, some stables, and water wimpling like molten glass over the pantiles of the gutter ; and since the foreigner (almost as tall as Fitzgerald, though slenderly built), from the first passes proved himself an antagonist of great skill, Macdonald drew in his breath : for Fitzgerald, he knew, had in him a quart of The Bell's canaries.

A continual motion, to, fro, back, fore, at the hips of the fighters, while the revellers stood round with comments, eager peerings ; and always the stranger smiled, but the face of Fitzgerald heated : and suddenly, at a foin made high up by the foreigner, down the jaw of the Geraldine ran a thread of red.

" Steady, Fitz . . . ! " Macdonald whispered.

But steadiness was no longer part of the game—both mouths now open, as the fight began to stagger hither and

thither, the crowd opening wider, stooping, hands on knees, to peer : for the Geraldine had met the devil, and, in his rage of incredulity, was operating with the fury of one chopping at a flame ; until now the combat fills the yard, the spectators cringing against the wall, from whose top the hens look on with a right eye sideward, then with a left, while Fitzgerald's redness has turned to mottle, and the two rush round with murderous stares, and a murmuring of their chests. That sallow face of the foreigner is now a face of rapture : he pitches anew upon Fitzgerald, and in a moment of opportunity sticks between neck and shoulder, whereupon Fitzgerald feints at the head, and, as up goes the parrying rapier tardily, attacks in *tierce*. " Hew, Fitz ! " Macdonald hisses. Fitz hews. His blade, feeble now, drops upon the foreigner's skull, whose rapier leaps far with clattering, whose skull strikes the flags. Fitz drops upon the foreigner, and springs up again with a wry grin, giggling a little, awakened from a nightmare.

But that heart in the dark of the parlour yonder ! it was worse with her than with the Spaniard in his blood : for her, a girl from the country—ignorant, uncertain of the consequences of her act—that was a thing she was at there !

The hand which she held out fluttered, a stare widened her eyes, her breath coming rough, like the breath of Fitz in the court.

But she did not hesitate at all, saw the fall of the foreigner, saw Fitzgerald hale and hearty, who that night was to revisit her nest ; and she put out her hand, that Fitz might have other cares that night than the abducting of damsels ! might forget the existence of Laura Ford !

Her little nose all pinched, her heart agitating itself to death . . . !

Yet no hesitating : the thing to be done she did : her hand was in the cloak of Garrett Oge Fitzgerald. One lunatic look round the room she threw, saw it solitary, touched the letters, drew them out.

Then she raced, chased by terrors.

CHAPTER V

THE ALCHYMIST

Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage . . .
Goldsmith.

They came trooping back into the sombre parlour, and instantly, the duel ended, their interest died down into indifference, the stranger left lying in the court.

And "Well, well", said the Pursuivant, fumbling at papers in his doublet-breast, "late am I this day. This comes of loitering and lingering. Yet one half pottle-pot of bastard mine host, and then away on the King's business".

"What, so early gone, Master Pursuivant"—from the mercer—"when good fellowship only begins to warm? And whither away?"

"A neat's tongue, mine host, with a warm cullis, if you love me", shouted Fitzgerald above the din of tongues, doing on his cloak, "or such a thing as a dish of spitch-cocked eels".

Mine host went hobbling, burdened with orders, somewhat sobered; and "Where's the lass? Where's Bessie Ford, John?" he went asking: "In faith, 'tis ever so—few hands to many needs".

"'Tis the alchymist, Calvo, whose arrest I go to make", answered the Pursuivant to the mercer: "I should now be at London Bridge with my warrant"—the air full of tongues, cups half-empty being drained.

"But the man is not dead", said the Cheap butcher: "'tis a pity he be left like an ox without chirurgeon's aid——"

"Truly, I believe you", said a scrivener of the Jewry: "hi, mine host, the man is not dead——"

"Softly, my masters", answered mine host absently, "each thing in his time: seen-to he shall be, and by Master

Bygood of Bishop's Gate, the druggist : for as fair a gentleman is he as ever spoke, and here hath lodged a se'ennight, paying his shot like an earl—but each thing in his time ".

" But Calvo ! What, the alchymist ? " cried the mercer : " wherefore arrest him, prithee ? "

" Witchcraft, friend ", answered the Pursuivant drily : " 'tis a deadly one, a dark and evil one, this Mauro Calvo ".

" Yet 'tis a strange happening, this warrant of arrestment ", said the mercer, " for Signior Calvo is a fellow in high favour among the common folk in London, and hath been known to tell them things which came afterwards to pass like Holy Writ ".

" 'Tis even wherefore his skin shall burn : 'tis an unclean beast, for——"

He got no farther : an outcry of alarm, of horror, had come from Fitzgerald's table, he having touched the slit in his cloak, and made a discovery.

" By God's death . . . ! " He had been much trusted—his third day in the King's service—and the letters were gone. . . .

He flushed with rage ; then sank back to his seat, faint.

" Fitz ! what hast thou ? "—from Macdonald.

When Fitz showed his cloak Macdonald looked round, asking : " Who has left this room ? "

It was discovered that three of the revellers had gone away after the duel.

" No man shall now depart till he has been searched ", cried out Macdonald.

The news spread consternation, the landlord paled, each seeming to see bent upon himself the frown of King Henry for his mere presence at such a thing ; and all came forward readily, parading the innocent nooks of their apparel from ruff to hose. Fitz did not look : his head leant on his hand ; but Macdonald cried out : " They have, then, been abstracted by one of those three ; or else by one of the innkeeper's people. 'Sdeath, mine host, your house must be searched ".

Whereupon a movement was made toward the staircase behind the bar ; but Macdonald, running back, whispered to Fitz where he sat : " Tut, man, mourn not like a nun in Holy Week. At what hour was the letter to be handed to my Lord Wolsey ? "

" Before Vespers ".

" 'Tis not far from that now. Here's my counsel, Fitz : leave the tracking of the letter to *me* ; but, meanwhile, my Lord Wolsey, expecting the letter, and not receiving, may send messengers to the King, and so will thy case be declared, and thy fat be in the fire. Now, thou knowest the little lane at that south postern of the palace-wall, where messengers pass to the King's Chamberlain's apartments —'tis my advice that thither thou hie, and there take stand, with drawn sword preventing any soul to pass—Quick ! and there wait till I come ".

On which Fitz sprang up with fresh energy, and soon his hoofs were heard galloping away into stillness, while Macdonald ran to rejoin the search-party, whose approach Bessie, now standing in her chamber, heard, the letters in her hand.

It was certain that with such an army of searchers the house held no hiding-place : to tear up the papers would mean discovery of the shreds ; to burn them she had no fire ; but the thought of destroying King's-letters never occurred to her ; and when the steps came nearer she fell to her knees, her eyes turned white to heaven, till they were at the door, when she sprang up to run, for, apart from heaven, on earth there remained still for her one refuge—Mauro Calvo.

Calvo was a man who knew, in addition to other things, the Future : shown to him by the stars. To very many, for the sum of two groats, he told the future of their lives ; and to Bessie, who had quickly heard of him, he had told two futures of Laura Ford's life.

And they were good friends, she and Calvo : for though Calvo forgot in an hour many a face of his pilgrims, he remembered Bessie.

So, not knowing that the pile of faggots appropriated to Calvo's roasting was already dry (though Calvo himself, being a divining man, well knew it), when the steps were at her door she slipped through another door into a tiring-room, thence down a winding stair, and so to the front door of a gable ; and down the street she went running with hasting pattens, in that pretty freedom from hats usual then everywhere, as still in France—to London Bridge—a street broad at bottom, narrow above where the gables left an irregular line of sky ; and here was market, with money-changer, mercer, and the pretty apple-woman in her cap ; the bridge standing on sixteen blocks of masonry, some of them hollow, with windows : within one of which blocks was a Chapel of St. Catherine, within another—the twelfth, near the Surrey-side—the laboratory and den of Mauro Calvo. At high tide the surface of the river ran a foot above Calvo's head.

So, running, Bessie traversed three-fourths of the bridge, into a doorway on the west side, ran down a passage, whence four ladder-steps led her down to some narrow stone-steps, the descent of which involved a series of jerks ; at the bottom of which, where the darkness was deep, she tapped at a door, and in a minute was admitted into a room reeking of brews that sent their chymic fumes from a den still beyond.

Now before her stood Calvo in the light of a flame that danced blue-and-red under an alembic on a tripod, a light hardly augmented by the blotch of light in a lanthorn of horn on a stand ; and said he : " Surely, now, it is you. . . Why, I knew you would be coming ".

CHAPTER VI

THE MESSENGER

In the deep dungeon of some Gothic dome
Where night and desolation ever frown. *Beattie.*

Calvo poured a piggin of Malvoisy wine from a cruche, held it to Bessie's shivering lips, seated her on a stone stool, held ear a moment to his simmering alembic, sat on a table beside her—a man of forty-five, but older-looking, the underlids of his eyes drawn awry, the left showing a triangle of red flesh, whatever hair he had hidden by a skull-cap of black cloth, from which jutted a promontory of forehead bluff and blanched, he dressed in shabby black velvet, with pantofles.

" But the letters you hold ", he remarked, " surely they are King's-letters ! "—now at a shout and ado of some over-boiling crucible in the east room he flew, but in a moment was anew with her.

And now with heaving breaths she told her tale—why she had stolen, why had brought the letters to him to keep, while Calvo listened with one side of his face screwed up ; and she ended with " You told me—you *told* me—that she should be—married ".

" Did I say that ? "

" Yes ".

" Well, so she shall ".

" But—*when* ? Oh, I shall die if she be not married ! "

" As to when, now : the stars are not precise "—speaking in an absent way, not thinking of her, but of himself, for the profound man had an idea : that these King's-letters, if they contained secrets, might save him.

Not that Mauro Calvo feared the actual stake, or King, or Church, or powers of the land : he could escape, on his

side being some of Nature's secrets ; but the laboratory of a scientist is not made in a day, nor was it pleasant to be molested and hunted by the myrmidons of power.

" Never fear ", he said, absently patting Bessie's shoulder, " she shall be married : that is quite settled ".

" But, Master Calvo, to-morrow or the next day this man will outlive the loss of the letters, and return to thoughts of taking her off ! Oh, sir, I could not live through another day——"

" But I thought it was the King which you feared——"

" Did you not promise that the King should *never* see her ? "

" I think I did, I think I did. Oh, well, all will be right, never fear ".

" But if the man should re-think of her to-morrow—— ? "

" He will not ".

" Oh, he may—he *may* ".

" Never fear ".

" I cannot bear it ! "

" Then, what would you have ? "

" Let her be married this self-same night ! "

" How ! to-night ? That cannot be ".

Now she fell to her knees, with pleading eyes. " Help a poor girl ! I have heard tell of such things by a dispensation of the Abbot. Say she shall be wedded this night ! "

Now she was engaging the whole attention of Calvo, whose palm passed and repassed over the smooth convex of her hair. " Well, well, no weeping. If I can—— But to-night, say you ? Have you, then, a lover ready to which to wed her ? "

" Yes, sir—a poor lad—but a husband none the less ".

" Well, I will see to it. Have you any money ? "

" I have fifteen hoarded crowns ".

" That is ample. I will disburse the fees, and you shall disdamage me after. A frater of the Crouched Friars who pays me visits shall be here with cross and book immediately after compline. So now, you see, you have not prayed the diabolist, Mauro Calvo, in vain ".

He looked momentary kindliness, till anew he flew to right some crisis of his brewing crucibles ; and she, on his return, put her lips to his hand with the fervour of a dévote, murmuring : " Good father to me you are, sir ! "

" Well, well "—touching her cheeks ; and " Away now, away ", he muttered bustingly.

After closing the door behind her, for some moments he stood close to the light, the King's letters in his hand, hesitating ; but then smiled, and with a bistoury cut the silken thread of the letter to my Lord Wolsey.

Having read it, he coolly muttered : " Just the thing " ; then went at once to the stair, and began to call " Tommy ! Tommy ! "—a child of the house, the top stage of which was occupied by Calvo, where he had his observatory and optic tube ; also Tommy was a quirister in St. Catherine's near, and also a messenger pressed into the service of Calvo, his reward being a view anon of all those brews, retorts, and tubes, those pretty precipitates, trembling menstrua, simmering limbecs.

By the time Tommy appeared Calvo had written a note, which he handed to the boy, saying : " Thou wilt take this to Thames Street, number 12, and deliver it to Master Mark Bonner " ; and while Tommy was gone—the skirt of his buckram cassock, leather-belted, flying behind his legs—Calvo sat inditing two letters, one to his friend, the frater, one to the King . . .

> " If the King of his grace would deign to guarantee to his slave, Mauro Calvo, immunity in the performance of his lawful occupations from the persecutions of the King's myrmidons, then Mauro Calvo would undertake to keep privy in his own bosom certain secret purposes written that morning by the King to my Lord Wolsey, purposes of which he, Mauro Calvo, by his science, had knowledge ".

So wrote Calvo : but in this reference to *his science* he

misjudged Henry's intelligence, and the energy of Henry's rage, and the implacability of that will of steel.

The letter was hardly ended when Mark Bonner stood panting within the room, where he had frequently stood before, drinking with greed from the lips of Calvo that for which he panted—knowledge.

And Calvo : " Thou knowest Brother Bruno of the Crouched Friars, I think, Mark ? "

" Yes, worthy Master "—for many a day Mark fed free at the Friary " frater ".

" Then, thou wilt bear him this letter ; with this broad-piece thou wilt buy a ring for a bride, whom the good brother will marry here to-night ; and with the other letter thou wilt then make to the Westminster Palace, burrowing as near the King's person as thou canst before delivery. 'Tis urgent, Mark, and I wish thee a quick return ".

Mark bowed, and was gone, both he and Calvo being ignorant of the fact he had been sent to get his own wedding-ring ; nor that Garrett Oge Fitzgerald stood with a drawn sword in the path where Mark must pass ; nor that at this time Bessie was at Mark's lodging, waiting for him.

Waiting half an hour : walking, standing, muttering orisons, under a projecting garret, where, stepping back, she could see, far up, Mark's window open, and, hanging from the sill, a trunkhose, drying ; and she wrung her hands, mourning " Oh, my ! Oh, my ! "

If things should go other than she willed *that* night of all nights ! She left a message for Mark—to meet her beneath the river at Calvo's ; and off she went, running, the night now come . . .

If the wedding, after all, should lack a bridegroom . . . ! that would be hard. Her bosom strained with the prayer of her lifted heart, on her lips a constant mutter of prayer . . .

She had not yet been to Laura : for, on leaving the King's-letters with Calvo, she had hurried back to The Bell to tell mine host that she must be absent some time that night—willy-nilly, she must ; from The Bell she had gone

to Bonner's lodging ; and thence now hurried to the Whitefriars, where she ran up some broad stairs that had oak banisters, to the second landing, to a half-open door, and she cried " Ah ! " at Laura in her arms.

" Kiss me ! "

Laura kissed her.

" Oh, harder'n that ".

Laura kissed her harder, formally obedient, saying : " I did not expect thee. This is not thy night ".

" No . . . Laura, thou wilt be married this very night ".

" In truth ? To who ? "

" Oh, sweetard—Art not very sweet ? Dost love me, Laura ? But what a query ! Why, to Bonner, surely ! "

Laura clapped her hands once.

" Art glad, Laura ? "

" Oh, I like being married, I ! "—clapping her hands once : to ask the cause of this sudden marriage not occurring to her mind ! " But——" she added.

" Well ? "

" He has nothing ".

" I know it. But he is learned ; he will be a wise and worthy man, Laura. Oh, thou must love him, love him alway, more than life itself ! "

" I love him. But he has not a noble to buy me a forepart ".

" He shall live with thee beyond the city-wall ; and what I earn will nourish you both . . . But, ah, Laura, I have to scold thee, minx, for a thing . . . Dost talk to strangers ?—nay, I cannot scold thee ; I have pined so to see thee ! How much dost love me ? Come, kiss me more, girl, and tell it me in mine ear ! "

Laura, in the act of kissing her, cried " But——"

" Well, pig's-eye ? "

" I saw Mark not one half-hour gone, and he said naught of this marriage ".

" Oh ! " Bessie leapt up—in her preoccupation with Laura having half-forgotten her quest of Bonner—" thou

hast seen him ? So where is he now ? Faith, I was in a great scare, seeking him——"

" He is easy found ", said Laura : " was on his way to the King's Palace with a missive, and stopped to have speech with me ".

" Then, I go that way now : I may meet him——"

" Why, and I, too ", said Laura.

" Haste, then ! All will yet be well "—her eyes raised in a prayer of praise.

And a minute later they were hastening westward down that lane through meadows that is now the Strand.

CHAPTER VII

HOW A WEDDING UNDER THE RIVER FELL OUT

Then shall those creatures all forlorn
Warie the hour that they were born. *Lindsay.*

Il n'y a guère d'homme assez habile pour connaître tout le mal qu'il fait. *La Rochefoucauld.*

At that moment Mark Bonner stood confronted with Garrett Oge Fitzgerald in the lane of yew and holly leading from the southern postern of the palace-wall.

Mark had come whistling, his bonnet far back on his fall of ringlets, and still was whistling when Fitz said : " Hold ! what would you ? "

" I am a messenger to the King . . . "

" From who ? "

" I—was not told to say ".

" Then, return to him that sent you ".

" I may not pass ? "

" That may you not ".

" Nay, but I must ".

" Then, pass ".

" Sheathe first that ominous-looking sword ".

" Nay, friend, I am in no humour for jests to-night. Go thy way in peace ".

" Wherefore may one not pass ? "

" I will tell thee, lad : there is danger that the King receive unpleasant tidings to-night ; now, I am a King's Guard, so I guard the King—from unpleasant tidings, above all ".

" Then, I will tell you from whom I have the letter—from Signior Mauro Calvo, the chymist of London Bridge ".

" No, lad, no letters from any wizard-men to the King to-night ".

Whereupon Mark turned back upon his way, hesitatingly, uncertain what now to do, and finally, resting his foot on a fence, leant whistling, musing upon the moon, until he heard footsteps, turned, and saw Bessie and Laura Ford.

" Ah, this is happy meeting ! " cried Bessie.

" What make you here ? " asked Mark astonished.

" We shall be married this night ! " Laura blurted with one hand-clap; and Bessie explained to Mark how all was ready.

And Mark : " But in Signior Calvo's studio, say you ? Then, 'twas my own wedding-hoop I have purchased ! Oh, the abounding of my lucky star ! "

" Then, come, for the time is not far off . . . Have you delivered your letter to the King ? "—glancing at that appalling palace, whose exterior even was a terror to her.

" Nay, I have not delivered it ", Bonner answered, " inasmuch as a pestilent fellow stands yonder to prevent me ".

" Yet thou must come now . . . From who was the letter ? "

" Even from Signior Calvo ".

" Say you——? Oh, 'tis most great pity you should return and not deliver his missive ! Why are you debarred ? "

" Faith, the knave is somewhat incoherent : he would guard the King from unpleasant tidings——"

" Come with *me* : for a woman's tongue may more persuade ".

Now they went forward, toward Fitzgerald, and were near to him before, recognising him, Bessie suddenly screamed—for Fitz had looked round, and, looking, had recognised both Bessie and his sweetheart, Laura : so in an instant Bessie had turned, seized Laura, to whisper an impassioned " *Run!* ", to be gone down the path ; and Fitz, laughing, was after them, Bonner following behind all.

But the race ended suddenly when a man who had rushed into the path from a by-path collided with Fitzgerald—Fitz's friend, Macdonald, come to report the failure of his search for the letters ; while Bonner, for his part, seeing Fitz in collision, now took to his heels in the direction of the palace, and entered its postern.

" But—is't *thou*? "—from Macdonald : " what cherry-pit is this thou playest? "

" 'Tis the little perroquet of which I told thee to-day—flies yonder with little Bessie of The Bell . . . Hast found the letters? "

" No . . . But Bessie of The Bell? "

" Ay ".

" Phew! " went Macdonald.

" What of her? " asked Fitz.

" 'Tis she perchance hath the letters, blockhead! " cried Macdonald.

" How makest thou that? "

" I think only of the fact that she is in visible friendship with the pretty moppet which thou this day blurtedst thy intention to steal! She may have hoped to do thee some injury for thy misbehaving to her friend : and now I recollect that I saw her not at all after the letters disappeared—must have slipped away with them somewhither. Quick, Fitz! let's after them ".

By which time the girls, thinking themselves out of harm, had fallen to a panting walk : so within a few minutes the two men spied them afar ; and they, too, slowed their pace, clinging to shadow, tracking the girls.

On by the orchard-wall of Essex House, crowded with espaliers and a whiteness of blooms, and on by the oriels of the Knights Templars, through lonesomeness of bush-shadow and through moonshine . . .

Suddenly Laura Ford thought she would like to be married in a hat . . .

" Well, then, Laura, thou must e'en run fleetly to get it ", said Bessie, " for the hour is near, by my credit. Heaven grant that Mark Bonner be not late . . ." At once they doubled down an alley in the Whitefriars.

Now, to the two behind this sudden run looked precisely like flight, and cried Macdonald : " They have spied us! After them, lad . . . ! "

And now, dropping caution, they started on the chase

with loud footsteps, Bessie at the same time exclaiming: "Oh, my mother, we are still pursued!" and the girls spurted.

But, knowing that Fitzgerald knew the abode of Laura, to that abode Bessie now had no thought of returning: so down another alley she darted, dragging panting Laura into the first open doorway; and here, where all was dark and still, they waited in a corner of the hall, hardly daring to breath their laboured breaths: till, after two minutes, they heard the two men spurt past.

Now the men, missing the quarry, made for Laura's quarters, ran up the stairs, alarmed the family, demanded her room, ransacked it, Laura and Bessie being then well on their way through Paul's to London Bridge; so Fitz and Mac descended, stood in the alley, and said Fitz: "Whither-away now, Mac?"

"Vile business, this," muttered Mac at a loss; and presently, pondering upon emptiness, they strolled listlessly down to the river's brink, where they lost a long time, probably an hour, strolling about, watching the darkly-bushed river-margin and the sheet of water, into which moonshine beat.

"Filthy business!" Mac mentioned.

"By now the King knows", remarked Fitz.

"Most like".

"I knocked on the head a messenger from my Lord Wolsey, and there will be the very devil to answer for, Mac. Besides, there was a second—a messenger boy from the wizard-man at London Bridge".

"Oh?"

"Aye, and this same boy was with the maidens".

"And this boy with the maidens bore a message from Calvo?"

"Aye".

"Godamercy, Fitz, why said'st thou not this before?"

"How so?"

"Why, may-be 'tis the wizard has the letters! Know'st thou not this man? he is the confidant and oracle of many a young—and, since his skin is in peril of burning, and a

messenger of his was with the girl—Come, Fitz, try it ! "—they took to their heels eastward with new impulse.

Meanwhile, in the den beneath the river Bessie Ford and Laura were waiting, Brother Bruno and Mauro Calvo waiting : all ready for the wedding ; but a bridegroom lacked : and Bessie's palms were clamped together in one clammy clasp of trouble, for Brother Bruno was proving intolerant, Bonner did not come, while Calvo trotted about, decocting his brews, holding up vials to the light, adjusting a still, fidgeting, smelling some fishy jelly, wishing ever to " bind volatile Hermes ", who shied at being bound ; and now he would tap Bessie on the head, saying " Never fear, never fear . . . "

" Pray he come soon," breathed Brother Bruno : " even a Crouched Friar cannot subsist without eating "—a big bonhomme, asthmatic, with a depth of abdomen equal to his breadth of breast ; he drained at a gulp a piggin of Calvo's wine, and sat his bulk on a tripod with a sigh, the long cross of his Order rising and falling on his breast ; and Bessie Ford noticed the signs of his growing unrest with agony . . .

" Oh, Something is against me . . . ! " she went.

Now Calvo explained a theory to Bruno, who did not care, holding a test-tube and tiny balance before the friar's eyes ; and Laura, noticing her sister's careworn face, leant and said : " Don't fret ! he will come . . . "

It was really *she* who held Brother Bruno there ! He said : " And he should be the happiest groom, too, in the King's realm—he should, yes. Wherefore comes not the mumping knave ? "

So an hour drawled away ; and now Bruno rose to go . . .

Mark, meanwhile, was coming, fleetly, on horseback ; and with him, fleetly, on horseback, was coming King Henry the Eighth . . .

For when Mark had sent in his letter to the King's Chamberlain after half-an-hour's waiting in an antechamber, as soon as ever Henry had read those phrases, he had ordered the messenger to be detained . . .

Henry had the gift of deliberation in the midst of his most arrogant passions : and, instantly perceiving that Calvo had, and had read, his letter to Wolsey, like lightning he decided that he himself, and no other, must recover that open letter : moreover, that the eye which had read it must not see another rising of the sun.

He understood now why expected dispatches from Wolsey in answer to his own had not come ; remembered, too, the messenger he had employed—the newly-tried Kildare fellow . . .

When he sat again at an escritoire, and took a paper-of-state to finish its perusal, as he read, he threw it down, struck his fist, crying : " By the Splendour of God . . . ! " and went ranging through the chamber, stretching his elegant legs, till to a gentleman-in-waiting he said : " Tell three Guards to await me in the palace-court with two saddle-horses ".

He then went out, in ten minutes reappeared from a withdrawing-room, bonneted, muffled in a cloak, and, in the ante-room, casting an eye upon Mark Bonner as he passed, said : " Come, lead me to this Calvo ".

So when the cavalcade had set off with a lanthorn, Mark, trembling like aspen, led the gallop, the Guards behind, and in twenty minutes King Henry was getting himself down the steps of Calvo's den.

Hearing which, Bessie leapt up, expecting Mark, but for Mark beheld King Henry, and saw that the primary face upon which the King's eye rested was that face of Laura.

At that face Henry started, then instantly turned his eyes away ; and though the light was very dim, shed but from a blotch in the horn-lanthorn, Bessie saw this, trembling like a berry on a stem—knew the King, saw him look—*and turn his look away.*

As for Calvo, he was standing upright close to the inner Gothic door, regarding the King with his calm, goggle eyes : for, although Henry's visit was as sudden as thunder, and the reason of it readable in his aspect, still Calvo did not fear.

But why did not the King speak ? He had his finger outstretched, covering the alchymist, and on his tongue were the words : " Arrest me that rat ", but, instead, he turned his head to the girls to say : " Ha, mamsels, what make you here . . . ? " his face now wearing a sheepish expression of some peeping motive.

There was no answer ; as for Bessie Ford, cold with horror, she cringed and backed, as from some cobra, toward the inner door, close to the protection of Calvo, drawing her sister with her.

And at that moment Fitzgerald and Macdonald rushed bounding down into the room, and saw—the King, Fitz hanging his head, as the King's eye rested a second on him.

Now again the King's finger went out at Calvo, and this time he said : " Seize me that stinkard ! "

And even in that moment of his peril Mauro Calvo's eyes, resting on the face of Bessie, marked its pain ; even in that moment he had room in his brain to feel for her, to remember that the thing which she feared was even come upon her, and he grasped her arm in the same moment that, as the Guards moved to grasp him, the room was suddenly in darkness, the lanthorn at a touch of his finger having gone out.

A dagger now in his heart would hardly have surprised King Harry . . .

" Quick—light . . . ! "

Quickly a Guard, who, to have his hands free, had deposited the lanthorn he had carried on a step outside, where he had stood to light the King down, darted out ; and within a minute after the darkness there was light anew.

But where now was Mauro Calvo ? Gone. And Bessie and Laura Ford ? They were gone, too.

The men rushed into the inner room, ransacked it ; in rushing scrutiny they tapped the walls ; looked toward the vault, looked at the floor : the wizard had vanished on Satan's wing ; the maids had thinned to air.

Harry wry-pushed his mouth and gnawed the pout at a

corner, meditating with a scowling brow ; he took-in with his tongue-tip his moustache-end, to gnaw.

But his first words were curious, showing that the centre-of-gravity of his interest had undergone change : for low he said to Mark Bonner : " Knowest thou that girl ? "

Mark faltered : " Which, Sire ? "

" The taller ".

" Yes, Sire ".

" What is her name ? "

" Laura Ford, Sire ".

" Where does she reside ? "

" In the Whitefriars, Sire."

" If she does not return thither, find her, and I favour thee ".

He turned to Fitzgerald : " Ha, villain—my letters ! "

Fitzgerald said : " Stolen from me, Sire ; I deserve to be hanged ".

The King lowered his voice : " Thou sawest that girl even now ? "

" Yes, Sire ".

" If thou art truly a shrewd fellow, prove it : find her, and thou doest well. If coin is wanted, bear this ring to my Chamberlain ".

He turned to Macdonald : " Thou art in my Lord Wolsey's service, I see. I know thy face. What is thy name ? "

" James Craigie Macdonald, Sire ".

" A Scot : then, a shrewd fellow, I warrant. Tell my Lord Wolsey that the King takes thee henceforth into his service : and find me that girl which has vanished, if thou would'st reap a harvest ".

" I will do what trying can, Sire ".

" And thou ? "—to Fitzgerald.

" Why, truly, Sire ".

" And, thou ? "—to Bonner, who did not answer ; but the King, not noticing his dumbness, at once went fumbling out of the den.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FUGITIVES

Freedom all solace to man gives,
He lives at ease who freely lives,
And should think freedom more to prize
Than all the gold in world that is. *Barbour.*

Calvo's escape had been effected through a hole which did not at all seem to be there : for in one wall, which slanted a little inward toward the roof, was an opening covered with a disc of stone, its outer side rimmed with iron, which touched a ledge in the wall, imbedded in the ledge being three cylinders of loadstone, then called " Lydian-stone " : so that the disc, kept in place by magnetic force, only needed three loadstone-ends of the same polarity, stuck in a semicircle of wood, to be presented to its inner edge to cause it to fall by a component of its own weight upon the palm ; and Calvo had no sooner whispered Bessie and Laura, and pushed them through, than, himself following with a bag, he replaced the disc by a handle glued to its hidden face, and left the wall impenetrable.

Whereupon the fugitives groped their way up some steps in the thickness of the wall, at their top being a similar window, and before the window a little boat that lived there under the shadow of London Bridge ; which boat Calvo pushed off, and put out an oar.

In the middle of the river he stopped to look up at a black sky all bright with stars, thinking of his optic tube lost to him, and was pettish.

" Well, now, you see what you have brought me to ", he remarked.

And Bessie, her hands clasped in a passion of gratitude : " Oh, my good father, may the good God——"

" Yes, but you see what you have brought me to "—though this separation from his retorts and alcahests and alchemies had been brought upon him solely by his own letter to Henry.

As for Laura, her forehead was leant upon Bessie's shoulder, which trembled, while Calvo, up-looking, remarked old Aldebaran and Boötes, and three planets adrift in the deep . . .

" Mumping chuff, that King ! What, i' God's name, to do now ? "

There was silence.

" Sure, Master Calvo ", suggested Bessie, " my uncle of The Bell would not be slow to give hiding to so good a friend to me as you ".

" The Bell, is it ? Are *you* going back to The Bell ? "

" Why, yes, sir, as I suppose ".

" Very well, go your own way ; I have nothing to do with you—remember that, prithee. But did you see that chuff of a King look at your sister ? "

" Alas, Master Calvo, yes ".

" And did you understand the meaning of that look ? "

" Alas, alas, yes, sir ".

" Well, then, take my word for it, before morning he'll have all London searched to find her ".

" Holy Mother ! "

" Go to The Bell if you like, and take her with you : that will be the first place his spiers will hie to. But 'tis no affair of mine, understand. As for me, ere morning I shall be far enough from London ".

" Then shall I be left fatherless in truth, my master ! "

" Well, don't start crying ".

" You foretold me, sir, that the King should *never* see her ! "

" Did I say that ? Well, he *has* seen her, you see. The stars don't always mean what they say, young woman. But never mind—I can't abye the crying—we shall see, we shall see ".

He patted her head : and there was silence anew.

Then Bessie : " Do you mean that you will be taking us with you into the country, sir ? "

" What ! encumber myself with two young women—strangers to me—in that way ? "

" By my credit, no, that in truth would be asking a world too much, Master Calvo ! "

" It would ! Grammercy ! I am not your father—or I suppose I am not. And I without a groat to buy myself a platter of furmity withal ! No, you go your way, and I go mine. Only, whatever you do, don't cry, don't cry ".

Listlessly he patted her hair, his misshapen eyes roaming over that scroll of the zodiac unrolled over him.

Now Laura lifted her face to make an observation. " I don't like the country, I ".

" Why, Laura—*sh-sh-h*, dear ", whispered Bessie.

And Calvo : " Hullo ! here's the other one of them. What ! you don't like the country ? Well, into the country you go ! 'Tis you with your face that are the cause of all. What ! not like what your sister wishes ? Into the country you go ! "

Bessie's heart bounded for joy : for by the side of Calvo she felt an arm of mighty protection about her, divined continually that his heart was fatherly and his brain potent, and that both were hers.

He had now taken the oar again, was paddling toward the north bank in the direction of the Old Swan steps, and presently spoke good words : " Have you any money ? "

" Why, yea, Master Calvo ! fifteen hoarded crowns in a coffer at The Bell . . . "

" Very well. Go get them, and a bundle of clothes. Get into the house without letting anybody at all know, and look out for me in an hour : I will give three whistles. I go now to get horses for us ".

Bessie Ford whispered into Laura's ear : " Isn't he *good* ! " as the boat's prow touched the old slush of the steps ; and now the sisters went running, hand in hand, northward, while Calvo in the skiff slid into darkness still farther eastward, past Botolph's Wharf, toward Billingsgate.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPANIARD

> And up and down they pace with frantic air,
> And scorn a comforter, and will despair. *Crabbe.*

London now lay well drowsed, the watchman's lanthorn dawdling through a cemetery somnolence : only yonder, in Bridewell, was there to-do and movement, where a soirée went forward in the palace of Katherine ; and also, close by, in the Bridewell Palace of my Lord Cardinal of York, was light and some movement, and the smiting of a horse's fore-foot.

And eastward, in the yard of The Bell, were also four moving feet, Bessie's and Laura's, who descended some steps to a cellar-door of which Bessie kept the key in her hip-pouch, and thence through a trap-door ascended to her room.

There Laura sat on a bed on the floor, embracing her knees, woefully meditating, a droop of her left lid making the brown brightness of that eye littler than the brown brightness of the right, which droop touched her beauty with a melancholy very Andalusian in a brooding moment like this : for there was an hour to wait for Mauro Calvo ; and presently, when Bessie sat by Laura with the bundle ready, there was low talk in the dark . . .

" Well, Laura, girl, it has come to this—the King hath seen thee ".

" Is it that we go back into the country ? "

" Why, certes, as thou know'st. Do not fret, now, nor be cruel ".

" I like being in London ".

" But thou wilt like the country also, sweet—— Be sweet

and good, now—oh, do ! Shall I not be with thee always and always ?—and Master Calvo also ? "

" What, that old lobcock ? "

" Laura, sh-h-h ! Oh, Laura ! "

" But is it that I shall not be married any more with Mark Bonner ? "

" Why, yes, of course, if the good God shall be our friend. But not now ! That King, Laura . . . "

Laura's hands met gaily in a single clap.

" I saw him look at me ! "

" Laura, thou did'st ? "

" He is very big and handsome, the King ".

" I hate him ! I hate him ! "

" He had six big rings on his left hand, and round his neck was a baldrick crass with balasses ".

" But that look, Laura ! Oh, there was no good in that look of King Henry ! "

" They say he is a great one for pretty girls, the King ! "

" Let him beware of *one* pretty girl, Laura Ford ! If that man meddle with thee, I *kill him*—God forgive me ! "

" But thou art not jealous of the King, Bess ? Phew ! I would not desert thee for him, not I ! Phew !—thank you, sirs—not I ! "

On which Bessie strained her in an embrace : for never could she quite believe in her possession of so bright a being as Laura, who seemed ever on the brink of taking flight from her arms : so that every rare phrase of love uttered by the other made her flush, and she treasured it long, like a rare coral, in her memory. But the embrace ended in both springing upright with stifled cries, for there, suddenly before them, holding a light, a bandage round his skull, in a déshabille of camisole and hose, stood the stranger with whom Garrett Oge Fitzgerald had that day done battle in the tavern-yard.

Finger on lip, he bowed low.

But almost before his eyes could rest upon the lovely face, Bessie Ford had cast over it a cloak lying close by,

had pushed Laura toward the tapestry, and at once, stepping before the stranger, puffed out his taper-light.

" Mamsel ", said the gentleman, " such precautions, by my faith of a caballero, are unnecessary with me : from me you have nothing to fear ".

" Then, what make you here, sir ? " asked Bessie.

" Truth to tell, lady, I have been put to bed in the neighbouring chamber with my cut skull, the door lies open, and I admit that I hearkened to most of your talk, on hearing the name of the King repeated by you. If, now, I say that the King seems no friend to you, and if I add thereto that I, at this hour, am no friend to the King, then, it ensues that you and I are friends ".

" But, sir, I scarce know you——"

" If I tell you who I am, you will better know me : a servant of the King of Spain, sent to England to search into certain allegations respecting the King in relation to Queen Katherine—"

" But, sir——"

" Nay, friend, I tell you candidly that I have need of you. Again I aver that no hurt is meant you : but the Infanta of Portugal, daughter of Ferdinand, is a personage of some importance, and—you hear ? that is one lock secured : I am going to leave the house, and here you will await till I return ; and now the other "—rushing from one to the other of the doors to lock them ; and in some moments he was heard in the next room striking a light, while Bessie Ford's wild eyes wandered about the darkness for help or hope ; and she called out : " Oh, Master Calvo will come, and we locked in ! Oh, surely Something is against me . . . "

CHAPTER X

THE CIRCLES SPREAD

Ah ! then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress.

Byron.

He was a man of that magnanimity and prudence, knew so well which way men were to be wheedled or destroyed . . .

Machiavelli.

The Spaniard butted his way toward a gable-door, drew the bolts, and went running down the slumbering Cheap toward Bridewell . . .

At this time King Henry, long since grown tired of his Spanish Catalina, was playing the gallant with a maid-of-honour of Catalina's Court, Anne Boleyn ; and when the answer of Anne, who had guile and a big ambition, was " No—I have a fancy for passing through the gate of marriage ", it occurred to King Henry, whose will, once stirred, was like a whirlwind, that the death of the heirs borne him by Katherine was a dispensation of Heaven for his crime in marrying a brother's wife : the word " Divorce " accordingly arose in the kingly brain ; and on the matter of " Divorce " he began to scatter argumentative letters upon my Lord Cardinal of York, getting in answer argumentative letters from my Lord Cardinal on that very matter.

Unfortunately, a nephew of Katherine was the Emperor Charles V. of Spain and Austria, the most potent of potentates : and in friendship with him was—the Pope.

Now, a whisper of how matters stood was in the air, and Katherine had written letters to Charles, her nephew : the King no longer cared for her, the King, the King, the King. So Charles had sent over, in reply, a secret agent, the Condê

Christoval Alvarada d'Ossorio, who, hearing Garrett Oge Fitzgerald brag of secret letters of the King in his cloak, had fought him in the yard of The Bell, hoping for a glance of those letters.

He had been balked by that great blade of Garrett Oge, and lay bruised on his bed, when there had come voluntarily to his ears, from the next room, yet another rumour of Henry's vagrant gallantries . . .

So down past the Cheap, past Paul's, he ran toward Bridewell.

Now, it happened that that was the eve of the Vigil of St. John, a day on which the " watches " levied from each ward, with Mayor, Sheriffs and waytes of the City, filed past the King ; and, this being the eve of that Vigil, the masque at the Bridewell Palace was in the night, though mid-day functions were then everywhere customary : so now Queen Katherine sat on a daïs in a hall gay with green birch, orpin, St. John's wort, a band of minstrels in an oriel playing rebeck, tabouret, virginals, lute, and before the Lady a blaze of flushed beauties, abbots, nobles, dancing that more gallant gavotte, the pavan.

At that time the sun was hot, the heart of Europe young : women knew how to be born beautiful, and men admired them with gusto ; also, everyone's tongue ran free, and extraordinary things were said.

But the Spanish melancholy was upon the Queen, who had taken to wear the drab fabric named " Lombardines ", and though this night her placard was an embroidery of diamonds, and her vest brocaded gold, and her cloak a green velvet of Genoa, ermine-furred, yet she remained a figure of grief, her ears awaiting a sound which did not come, awaiting the King.

Only after a long time he came. He had gone back to the Westminster Palace after the fiasco in Calvo's den, then, with a " Pah ! " of disgust, remembering the masque, had thrown-on a Russian masquerade, and, with the Earls of Essex and Fitzwater, had stepped into a whirlcote, hissing

to himself : " Christ ! 'tis a luscious bit . . . ! " So presently Katherine heard a sennet of hautboys and trumpets, and the herald-cry : " Henry, King of England and France, and of the provinces of Gascoigne, Guienne, Normandy, Anjou, Wales, and Ireland ! "

Now the Queen rose and stepped down ; the dance ceased ; and a lane formed, in which two eyes—the eyes of Anne Boleyn—waited for a glance. But no glance came ! Henry walked through, a plump and stalwart figure, to take the Queen's hand, saying listlessly : " Ah, lady mine " ; then sat sideways by her, sticking out an elegant left leg ; and presently, with a clap of the hands, cried " Dance it, then ! Let the music knock it ! " ; then sat listlessly again, his head on his hand, while the room slid into movement to the lilt of the canary-dance.

And presently Anne Boleyn, dancing nigh, armed her eyes with an under-glance of coquettish fire ; but Harry, taking from a cup-bearer a goblet of gingered ypocras, did not glance at her.

Then once again she came, she being a girl of brazen heart, prompt in action, strong in purpose—qualities which she wrapped up under the frivolity of a dancing-girl ; and dancing near, she said to her partner, loud enough for the King's ears : " The King is glum to-night : gogsnouns ! he hath the ' sweating-sickness ' ".

Starting at which challenge, Henry cried : " God ! the Lady Anne is penetrating to-night. Ha, mamsel, can you see beneath my clothes ? "

" Why ", said Anne, " a King is oft a naked thing to his lieges' eyes ".

A ribald jest leapt to the lips of Henry, but then he waved her off, with " Nay, go to, none of your banterings to-night, lady "—and Anne wheeled away with a raging bosom, these few words being to her nothing less than the shattering of a world of dreams—she a girl of twenty, specially French in manner when England was still French (she having been a maid of Queen Claude), with *embonpoint*, and quite an

out-push of kerchiefed bust, and frizzy straw-hair, and a broad brow, and a freckled nose, and a broad mouth, having character in its pressure, and a mole on the firm-fleshed short lip : pretty ! But, as for Henry, the face of *another* filled his brain that night—one far lovelier.

And now, five minutes after the King, arrives at the palace the Condé Alvarada d'Ossorio running, to hand a case containing half a ring to a gentleman-yeoman, who, mounting the stairs, gave it to Anne ; and Anne, kneeling, presented it to Katherine, on whose face was now a smile : for, having witnessed the King's rebuff of Anne, she was happy.

She took the *écrin* without opening it, though Anne had already peeped into it, knew whence it came, and waited for a message of reply ; but Katherine said : " Do not wait, lady ", and called another maid, to whisper : " Find below a nobleman wearing the wyvern of Aragon ; then bid him watch for the King's departure, and await me in the palace-orchard ".

Anne was now walking away down the hall, fierce at heart ; and, making his way through the crowd to meet her, was Monsignor du Ballay, the French Ambassador, a portly Churchman (Bishop of Bayonne), who could use his sword, a man greatly interested in the progress of Henry's love-matter with Anne : for, Henry being the balancing element between Francis, the French King, and Charles, the Spanish, if Henry offended Charles, France would be supreme. Hence Du Ballay loved Anne like the apple of his eye, and a minute since had seen her dismissed by Henry . . .

But before he could reach her, the lady-of-honour whom Katherine had sent down to the Spaniard, passing close to Anne, whispered her : " Guess you, child !—a secret meeting with the Condé Alvarada d'Ossorio in the orchard . . ."

Instantly resolving to be there, Anne started straight for an opening in the arras, and after her Du Ballay urged his way ; but when she, hearing footsteps behind her in a dim corridor, and anxious at once to conceal herself in the

orchard, took to her fleet heels, he, though he added to his pace, was only just in time to spy her dashing down an outer stair of wood embowered in jasmine : so, still keen to have speech with her, he, too, descended, and went rummaging through the rank vegetation of the manor-close, seeking her.

A few minutes later Harry rose from his seat, said *bonsoir* to the Queen, stalked from the hall ; and immediately the Queen, too, rose and left it.

Now, the grounds of the Queen's Bridewell Palace abutted upon the grounds of the Bridewell Palace of my Lord Cardinal of York, who that night had come hither from Hampton; and, at the moment when Anne concealed herself in the Queen's close, was walking in the spiced air of his park under a sky all stars.

Clad in his Cardinal-frock he walked—cassock, rochet, and mosette—both hands flat on his chest ; stout as an old woman ; with the quick-planted steps of a vexed old woman. On his head sat a four-cornered baretta of red, and on his frowning brown brow sat—deliberation.

Divorce ! Divorce !—that now constantly recurring word: this was the burden of his thoughts.

He was dead against it : saw that it must fatally offend Charles ; and Charles was the Pope's friend, and Wolsey aimed at becoming, some day, Pope. At least, if Henry's will must have its way, if Spain *must* be against England, Wolsey decided that, as a set-off, France must be gained ; he therefore desired that the Duchesse d'Alençon, sister of Francis, should replace Katherine, since Katherine had to be dismissed. As for Anne Boleyn, he abominated her—his obstacle, his danger, his fate.

And suddenly, as he walked there in the park, a hope came voluntarily to him—a hope in the form of Laura Ford : for, as he walked, an old pistoler came running from the palace in buckram cassock, with a pant on his breath : " My Lord Cardinal——"

" What is it ? "—from Wolsey.

" James Macdonald, one of your Grace's ewerers, hath importuned me to crave speech of your Grace for him ".

" Go :—you see I am meditating ".

" He said 'twas urgent ".

" Get you gone ".

" Well, well ".

But, as the old man turned to hobble off, Wolsey said : " Is it that young Scot which I sent with letters to Stirling Castle ? "

" The same ".

" Send him ".

So in three minutes James Craigie Macdonald was bowing before Wolsey.

The Cardinal continued his walk of petty quick steps, hands on breast, his stubby nose sublime, his bright brown eyes deliberative ; and Macdonald, like a towed boat, followed—toward the orchard, where hedges were heavy, and foliage lush ; till Wolsey said : " Well, what have you ? "

Whereupon Du Ballay, who, in seeking Anne Boleyn, had unconsciously got into Wolsey's grounds, hearing near the sound of Wolsey, stole closer, and stooped with a grin within thicket, to listen : for luck is the finishing touch of the diplomatist, and to peep through the right hole in the nick of time, here is the trick of Courts. At that very moment Anne, too, was straining her ears to catch the Spanish talk of Katherine and the Condé Alvarada d'Ossorio not far off.

" What have you ? "—from Wolsey.

And Macdonald : " I came to acquaint your Grace—the King would have me leave your service straightway, to enter his ".

Now Wolsey stopped his walking, surveyed Macdonald.

" So. What for ? "

" He hath imposed upon me a special duty, sir ".

" What ? "

" Must I needs acquaint your Lordship's Grace ? "

" Art not my sworn man ? Give it me ".

Macdonald, eyeing the ground, waltzed his steel cap round his forefinger.

" Come, Scot, you keep me waiting. Give it me, man ".

" If I enter the King's service, I keep his secrets ", Macdonald boldly said.

" Palterer ! Now—give it me—into mine ear——"

" Faith, I'd liefer not, Your Grace ".

And now Wolsey, the more cunning, and the less honest, said : " Do'st wish to displeasure me ? Dream'st thou that I do not already know, and but try thee ? The matter relates to a wench ".

Not a very recondite guess ; but its confirmation of Wolsey's reputation for omniscience conquered Macdonald, who now said : " In faith, my Lord, it doth ".

" Which wench ? "

" Name of Laura Ford ".

" When and where did the King first encounter this Laura ? "

" Even now, in the den of the alchymist—Calvo—under the river ".

" So. He was there : in the den of the alchymist—Calvo —under the river—yes, I knew. And there he saw her—her name Laura Ford. And thou, Scot—hast thou, too, seen her ? "

" I have, my Lord ".

" Is she—— ? Art thou a fellow which knowest a pretty wench when thou seest her ? "

" Why, my Lord, yea ".

" Is she hitting ? Doth she spank the eye ? "

" Bread and salt, my Lord, she doth ".

" She is spicy, eh ? Thou hast seen her. She tickles the regard, eh, Scot ? Hast ever seen the Lady Anne Boleyn ? "

" Yea, thrice, my Lord ".

" Then, tell me—reflect, then tell me : would'st thou liefer cuddle, varlet, the Lady Anne, or this Laura Ford ? "

" Why, Laura, my Lord, forty times o'er, since you ask

me. I tell your Grace, 'tis the most curiousest, most flashiest, moppet I ever laid look upon ".

" So. 'Tis fair and good. And now tell me : when the King saw her—how looked he ? "

" Faith, he looked, sir, like one dazzled ".

" He did ? Looked like one dazzled ! Yes—go on—tell me, Scot ".

" Before the King could have speech with them, Mauro Calvo darkened all the den, and evanished with the maidens ".

" ' Maidens '—more than one ".

" The other, I learn, is sister to Laura : name of Bessie Ford, and chamberlain to The Bell in Eastcheap ".

" The Bell, Eastcheap. And when they evanished thus —what said the King ? "

" On the instant he forms a bond of my own self, one Fitzgerald, and one Bonner, to go in search of the girls ".

" Is he not a prince of most royal will ? prompt in purpose ? conquering in action ? He is in earnest, then, in this matter. But stay—hast found the girls ? "

" Nay, my Lord, we have but hied to the Westminster Palace to fill our purses, and we go now to The Bell : so, on the way, I stopped to tell you that I am now, by your good leave, no more your man, but the King's ".

For a minute Wolsey, intensely thinking, said nothing ; then : " I grant the leave thou cravest. But do not yet set out : wait with thy companions half an hour, till I have further speech with thee ".

Macdonald bowed ; but by Du Ballay, listening within his shrubbery, this question was asked : " *Why* the half-hour's delay ? " and when, Macdonald having gone, he saw Wolsey go trotting in heavy haste toward the mansion, he guessed the answer : the delay was due to Wolsey's will to take Laura Ford before the King could.

Now, since Wolsey was as much the enemy of Anne as Du Ballay was her friend, whatever was Wolsey's scheme in seizing Laura Ford, it was clearly a scheme unfriendly

to Anne ; and this, to Du Ballay, was a sufficient reason to make him speed from that place, with a view of anticipating Wolsey in the seizure. Through the Queen's manor-close he hastened with agitated cymar of white damask-silk, out into the lanes, home to his palace in the chase north of the Knight Templars ; and within ten minutes the horses of himself and four men-at-arms were charging eastward up the Cheap.

But, as Du Ballay dashed from the Queen's palace, the Queen, in her orchard, was remarking : " Yes, you will seize this girl, my good Condé. Poor King Henry !—he is frail in this way. And I, look, am only a woman—I cannot bear another infidelity just now ".

" If *she* is removed, the Lady Anne Boleyn remains ", said Alvarada bitterly.

" Yes, but I have a notion that the Lady Anne will whistle in vain after her flown eyas : for, if one were to divine from what I have witnessed to-night, the dear changeling no longer hankers after that hussy ".

" To seize the girls I need help : it was therefore that I came to your Grace ".

" Help you shall have, and now : the valiant Sir John Perrott, and Lidcott and James Burdet, shall be with you. Come. Send the girls across the seas, good Condé, providing well for their sustenance. Come ".

But in the leafage there listened a girl whose lips curved at the Queen's girlishness. " How little ", Anne thought, " must this woman know of her husband, when she imagines in this fashion to cure him of a passion ! If he doth not find this Ford girl, he will hunt her with a growing hunger to his dying day ! "

And Anne willed that he should hunt herself : a thing which, she knew, he would not now do, until the day when he flung Laura Ford away, a discarded thing : and to hasten that day, she, Anne, intending to get the girl into her own hands to give to her King, went with her skirts held up, furtively treading, through the lanes of the close,

then was running through the labyrinth of the palace, and, in the dancing-hall, with hurried breath was at a young man's ear, with " Percy !—quick !—here ! " towing him into an alcove.

This " Percy " was the heir of the Earl of Northumberland—big-bosomed, bow-legged, a gallant of twenty-two, blue-eyed, with locks of flaxen silk—with whom a year gone Anne had had a flagrant love-intrigue, nipped by Wolsey ; and she panted : " Thou art to go—quickly—and a buss for thee, on the lips, you hear ?—if thou succeed'st—to The Bell—in Eastcheap ! Two girls—locked in a room, I think—seize and bear them away—anywhither—but quick. If they be not there, hunt them—hunt them far and wide ! The Bell in Eastcheap—now ! "

He squeezed her at the waist, dashed back his hair, rushed away, and before long was clattering eastward with four through the Cheap.

At nearly the same moment three Wolsey-men galloped from the Cardinal's palace, as Alvarada, with three Queen's-men, had already galloped from the Queen's palace, and Du Ballay's five from the Ambassador's palace.

For, if Anne was profound, Wolsey was more profound still, knew his King, and had said to himself : " The King will continue to pursue this Laura Ford, to the exclusion of the Lady Anne, up to the week after he gets her into his hand : that week Anne will regain her sway. The King must not, therefore, get her into his hand, but I : and lest his flame for her, for lack of fuel, wax cool, I, having her, will continually reincite him by new hopes of her, under such conditions that he shall hope only, but not touch ".

Hence it was that at the moment when his three had set out for The Bell, the King's three, Fitzgerald, Macdonald, and Bonner, still sat in the Cardinal's *salle d'attente*, waiting through that " half-hour " of the Cardinal's command ; until Garrett Oge, raising his great frame, and letting go his chin, said : " 'Tis wearisome this. Is it meet, my masters, that a Geraldine should wait on a Cardinal ? "

" 'Tis an abstract question in Logics ", observed Bonner with a smirk.

At which Garret Oge Fitzgerald chuckled, in a single hour the face and phrases of the student-stripling having grown pleasant to the warrior's fancy.

" 'Tis a question in theology, boy ", said Garret Oge : " I call it a Cardinal sin ".

" Still, we must needs stay ", said Mac, " since the Cardinal bids us ".

" But the King bids us go, Mac ".

" The Cardinal is the King's King, Fitz ; and his wrath's as red as his robe ".

" Or as his nose : yet they burn not, Mac. Moreover, this day twice hath the King entrusted me the executing of his will, and this time I have no intent to fail him encore. *Why* wait we here, Mac ? "

Macdonald said : " If thou art bent upon going, I am with thee ".

Fitz jumped up. " Come, then, Cardinal or no Cardinal. Come, boy . . . ! "

Bonner wondered why *he* was going, and what would be the end ; yet he went—with a hand on Fitzgerald's shoulder ; and soon they were storming past Paul's eastward.

But as soon as ever they reached Eastcheap, they were aware of a hulabaloo and to-do in the neighbourhood of The Bell : a block of armed men on chargers, and calls, threats, brandished blades, rearing steeds : there were flaring cressets ; batteries at the tavern-doors, frighting the night ; there was the nightcap of the landlord popped in amaze from a casement.

Fitz and Mac drove rowels into their animals' flanks, and dashed toward the fracas, Fitz shouting to Bonner : " Stick close, boy ! *Crom Aboo !* " as out with a sound bounded his sword.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM OF THE BELL

Mit Stürmem sich herum zu schlagen. . . .

Goethe.

Most of the five parties—the King's, the Queen's, Anne's, Du Ballay's, and Wolsey's—were astonished at the presence of the others at The Bell !—nineteen of them : the King's three—Fitz, Mac, Bonner ; Du Ballay with four French knights on steeds caparisoned with purfles ; hot young Percy of Northumberland, sent by Anne, with three livery-men ; the Condé Alvarada, with the huge Sir John Perrott, and two Queen's-men ; and, lastly, three of Wolsey's gallants.

Of all these Alvarada alone knew that the two maids were locked in a chamber, and where : the keys of which chamber he had in his doublet.

Now, the Spaniard, on passing out of the inn, had left a door unfastened, though closed ; and when, on arriving, he made for it, his surprise at finding some men thundering at another gable-door was augmented when he was actively attacked by these men—Du Ballay's : for Du Ballay wrongly presumed that the Spaniard's men were the Wolsey-men whom he expected to come ; and, at once spurring with a waving weapon, he spurted upon the Spaniard, now dismounted : for works, not words, was the way then.

Whereupon Alvarada on lower ground, he having gone down the steps to the door, parried a stroke at his head, then ripped his skilled rapier all below Du Ballay's horse's throat ; and in a trice the charger had dived, hurling the Churchman over its eyes.

Meantime, the feet of seven steeds were striking fireworks

out of the pavers, for the four French had rushed at Alvarada's three English, and in another minute Alvarada himself had vaulted to his saddle and entered the affray. He, after three passes, pricked a French knight through the gorget, while his Sir John Perrott, one of the most fiery of fighters, cleft the helm and skull of another French, in spite of the heavy iron then worn. So, the French being now reduced to two, the mêlée ought to have been short : but at that moment young Percy with three henchmen, armed with bow-and-arrow, spear, demi-lance, reached the scene ; and, feeling how his sorrel horse went wheeling at a blow upon its polished haunch, Percy called " Northumberland ! ", hurled up his short battle-axe, and commenced to hew at whom he met.

Upon which his braves joined in, and the broil was general, a chopping clash, mingled with struggling hoofs, spattering sparks, transacting itself over an area of some fifteen yards ; and now the landlord's head was out of window ; and, down a length of households agape, drowsy nightcaps at gables peered out beneath lights held up.

Only Alvarada, being unarmoured, was open-faced and known, the other fighters having-on masks or visors ; and he was parrying the brusquerie of Northumberland's onslaughts, his Sir John Perrott having just shattered the arm-piece of Bishop Du Ballay, who had risen to fight on foot, when Wolsey's three gallants arrived, and galloped right into the pother ere they could stop their impetus ; two of whom, molested at the same moment, set to work with instant briskness, rising in their stepropes, while the third, their leader, forged beyond the region of chopping steel, and, leaping, began to bang with hubbub at a door of the tavern.

And while the landlord still pried paralysed upon this nightmare, yonder, to westward, was raised the cry of " *Crom Aboo!* ", and the blade of Garrett Oge was in the air, he at once divining that this fighting was for the possession of Laura Ford ; and, partly for Henry's sake, whom

he had already happened to fail, he galloped forward with something like gusto.

Partly for Henry's sake, and partly—so complex is the heart—for Bessie Ford's : for now Garrett Oge knew somewhat more of Bessie, and at the memory of that girl jerked his head.

In a moment he was in the struggle, his hand against every man's, his tool ranging everywhere, like the very tooth of pestilence, sure token of sudden death . . .

With two cleaves he sent to hell a Wolsey-man and a gentleman-in-waiting of Queen Katherine ; but his horse, brought down from a rear by the impulse of his last hit, slipped on the street-grass, and was struggling to right itself when he was attacked on the hind-flank by Sir John Perrott at present helmless, on his face a mask of red ; whereat Fitz, twisting on his heaving steed, received one blow on his elbow, the rain of the next three he received on his sword-edge in a clash, clash, clash of three distinct notes, and in a moment more four front-teeth of Perrott lay loose in his mouth ; but in the same moment Fitz, attacked in front and on the other flank by Alvarada and the young Northumberland, was in a risky bit : for although his helmet was of Milan flutes, and his corselet good ring-mail, he wore neither visor nor greaves, and his Macdonald was engaged some distance away. (As for Bonner, although he had been given a blade, he sat haloed in his mass of ringlets beyond the rudeness of the battle, musing on abstract things.) But when a street-lantern revealed to Fitz the features of the very Spaniard with whom he had that day fought in The Bell's yard, his ardour of effort now redoubling, he executed a *demi-volte* with a hack at Percy's haunch which drove the Northumbrian horse at full shock upon Sir John ; whereupon Sir John and Percy engaged ; then with an opposite *demi-volte* Fitz had the Spaniard *vis à-vis*. And now round wheeled the two steeds, head to head in stepping waltz, with little spurts and curvets, spattering sparks, as the brands did battle : but before the event up

came Macdonald at a canter, and engaged against the Spaniard.

If Fitzgerald fought like a storm, Mac fought like a rock—without rage, without fail, the pressure of his lip visible betwixt the moustache-wings, his eye gleaming guilefully, like cold steel of the thinker's eye, under the lowered lids ; but before he could bring his mare into position to aim a stroke, there arose an outcry from the inn : for the Wolsey-man who had been pounding at one of the doors, had moved on to pound at another—the one left open by the Spaniard : and, shouting " Jack ! an open door ! " in he dashed, while Alvarada, hearing this, and fearing the loss of all, leaped to slip into the inn.

At this moment Mauro Calvo sat on a mule regarding the struggle, holding two jennets by their halters, having come, as arranged, for Laura and Bessie.

Now, the rush within the inn of the two Wolsey-men and of Alvarada was the sign for a general rush, the fighting-men left alive now leaping from their steeds, and, with here or there a mutual cut, squeezing through the doorway ; and said Mauro Calvo : " Well, now, a murrain on these cattle. This will never do for me, young women : go ye your way, and I go mine ".

But then he muttered low, as if ashamed : " Though 'tis a worthy soul, that Bess : a spirit, I fancy, of uncommon chemistry ".

CHAPTER XII

CALVO'S BAG

In that wight's pouch were oddish ends,
Strange relics, gews, and witcheries. *Old Tale.*

In turning, however, to go his way, Calvo discerned Mark Bonner in the half-dark, and " Well, what mak'st thou here ? " he asked.

" Faith, Master, I have the smallest notion ", answered Mark, with a doffed cap.

" Who are these brawlers ? "

" They are King's-men, as I surmise, come to take my sweetheart Laura : yet, strangely, they hack one at the other in the way you see, having, as is like, more sword than sense ".

" That chuff of a King ? What ! so soon would he be at that poor Bessie Ford ? Were it not for one thing, I'd——"

" Prithee, Master Calvo, if you can succour them——"

" I have half a mind—indeed—yes, have her he shall not, the chuff ! "—turning his animal back, then giving the three prearranged whistles : but there sounded out into the street only the uproar that now filled the house ; so he dismounted, called " Come, boy ", and, humping his bag, sauntered into the house, in which the searchers had now spread themselves over the upper floors, searching each for himself, only Alvarada knowing where the girls were incarcerated ; and the sword-play had, for the moment, ceased in the dispersal of the searchers, till young Percy, rushing with battle-axe and torch, saw himself stopped by a locked door, and began to hack at it : whereat Alvarada ran to inflict a rather dastard stab from behind, and Northumberland, finding himself stuck, began to bawl " Clubs ! Clubs ! "—a call signifying " Help ! "

And now Fitz and Mac, who were running by, attracted by this racket, rushed into that room, and since Percy had stuck into a sconce a flambeau which he had snatched, Macdonald, seeing by its light the chopped door, cried out : " Here the girls are, Fitz ! kill these two ! " and began with his bill to batter at the door, while Fitz turned upon Percy and Alvarada.

But now two of Percy's Northumbrians, together with three other of the strugglers, among them Sir John Perrott and the Bishop of Bayonne, rushed in, the mere spectacle of Macdonald heaving at a door making that door the centre of interest for all ; and a mixed scrimmage, as savage as indiscriminate, commenced to transact itself within the small apartment, while at the open door stood Mauro Calvo, looking on with his calm eyes ; and three of the men had already fallen when he closed the door upon them all.

For the mêlée before the locked door had led him, too, to the conclusion that the sisters were in the room beyond it : and he let down his bag to the ground.

Having noticed that the one window of the room of the struggle was closed, the only ingress for air now being the two key-holes, Calvo inserted into the key-hole of the door that he had closed the pipe of a baggy kind of bellows made of Spanish foot-cloth, and began to work the bellows.

At that moment, for the third time that day, Fitzgerald was engaged with Alvarada ; but now the breaths of the strugglers grew wondrous short ; they began to gasp in agonies of effort ; and soon the room was full of pants, desperate breasts : Sir John Perrott and Du Ballay, who were wrestling, collapsing together a thumping lump of carcase ; Macdonald with a last sigh resigning himself to die ; and, as down upon the brow of the Spaniard sped the blade of Fitz, the blade failed, Fitz failed, the Spaniard failed, and together, with a gasp, they collapsed : over the floor lay seven lumps of humanity ; and, without, Calvo pumped-in cyanogen gas.

He then fanned some fresh air into the chamber with the

door, stepped quickly among the prostrate men, and by one thump of his back upon the locked door, now well hacked, was in the next room.

There stood Bessie grasping Laura by the hand ; and suddenly uttered a cry : " Oh, bless God ! "

" Get you gone ", said Calvo, talking calmly, like a calm god to Bessie's ear : " you will see two nags in the street—away on them, and await me in front of Essex House ".

They were off, seeing, even as they picked their steps among the prostrate warriors, a stirring among them ; but the girls were already well on their way ere Fitz, the first to get his senses, leapt to his feet.

By which time Calvo, his bag on his back, was going about the house, without hurry, crying : " Hi, there, landlord ! mine host ! " till presently, in a high garret, he came upon the old man, hiding in an ague, who said to him : " Why, sir ! what may betoken all this battery in an honest house-of-call at this hour of the night ? "

" That you may discover for yourself, friend ", replied Calvo : " all I need tell you is that your niece is in danger, and I am her friend—I being that Mauro Calvo which you know of. Therefore is it that you will not fail in the following mission : You will find one Brother Bruno of the Crouched Friars, and deliver him a missive which I shall hand to you, with a message from me that he dispatch the same to its address in the Kingdom of France ".

Saying which, Calvo took from his bag a cista containing ink horn, quill, a seal, black resin, and parchment ; then, leaning against the wreck of a buffet to write, he muttered : " Now, Master King, let us see whether we cannot pit against you an antagonist worthy your steel. Never met such a chuff in all my life ! " And he wrote :

" To Francis the First, King of France, from Mauro Calvo these presents.

" That most perfectest girl in the world, of whom Mauro Calvo, it is now four years gone, prophesied to

Francis the First the government, is now in the Kingdom of England. She is to be found about the cathedral-city of Winchester, and standeth in instant peril of capture at the hands of Henry of England. Mars being in conjunction with Sol in the Fourth Shamaim, and Venus retrograde in the Sixth House, it is indicated that around the maiden shall spread conflicts ; nor, save by prowess of arms, can she be won ".

The scientist re-read his letter smiling, and now muttered : " That should fetch the other chuff over ".

Now he handed the letter, duly sealed, to the landlord, then went down, and mounted his mule, to speed westward, the combatants still rummaging in the inn, among them Mark Bonner, who in all the dark and raging had lost sight of the sage.

CHAPTER XIII

AT KEW

Ποιήσον ἀμπελούς μοι ! *Anacreon.*

It was not long before the searchers in the inn determined that the girls were no longer there, and " Phew, cameradoes ! but I could drink well a pottle of posset ", gasped Fitzgerald, staggering out to the street.

And Mac, staggering, too : " Well, Fitz, hast had thy bellyful to-night ? "

" Nay, Mac, but would have it, as I say : posset, ye saints, browsed of warm cow's-milk and boon Porto, well sugared and cinnamoned ! But, by the Rood—where is that boy ? "

" Which boy ? "

" Why, the boysie Bonner, sure . . . ! "

" Faith, I know not ".

" He is killed ! " cried Fitz ; " sure, sure ! "

" Nay, but he lives, for there is he "—as Bonner now appeared at a doorway, sauntering out, and Fitz darted to throw an arm round his shoulder, and say " Why, boysie " —in a low voice.

" I live to tell the tale—in hexameters ", Mark said.

" What are hexameters, boysie ? "

" Verses with six feet ".

" But six-footed things do crawl, boysie, and thy verse should go brisk like the action described ".

" Nay, but verses, unlike other polypeds, go not on all feet at once, but hopwise, foot by foot, which property is called their Scansion ".

" Still, boysie, I say——"

" Fitz ! hither ! " now cried Mac from some distance,

and when Fitz ran, " See there ", cried Mac, " hoof-prints of two horses that have trod in blood, and gone galloping —observe their stride. If the maidens were verily in the inn, this may be——"

" Hath anyone seen aught of Master Calvo ? " asked Mark suddenly.

" What ! was the wizard here ? "—from Mac.

" Even he ".

" Then, 'twas that cozener that rescued the girls ! " cried Mac—" Fitz, man, to horse ! "

" Hold, Mac : I leave not an inn full of fluids, with my weasand dry as a corned rey——"

" Ah, but there 'twas not the real Fitz that spake ", said Mac : " come, be whetting thy manhood, man, and leave thy weasand to wet itself ; our devoir to the King——"

" Oh, well, Mac ", Fitz muttered, convicted.

Five of the nineteen steeds which had lately thronged the street now strayed there, cropping the grass-grown pavers, the others dead or fled ; two of which five now took to flight, but three, after a little fling-away, and pretence of fleeing, accepted capture.

Fitz cried : " Come, boysie, haste ! " and they were off just in time : for now some other seekers came trooping out of the inn, one Wolsey-man saying to another : " Yon flyers were fighters in the inn : whither-away are they ? "

" After the girls, most like ".

" Yes, or I'm a beggar's brat ! Let's after ! "

" No steeds ".

" Pah ! then, home for steeds ! "

So these two started westward, and in another three minutes the same reasoning had agitated each brain, and westward for steeds became the *mot d'ordre*. In small parties, far-scattered now on their various ways, they went running about a London dead and buried in slumber.

Meanwhile, Fitz and his fellows, pelting past Somerset House, had encountered a watchman sauntering, and had called halt, Mac asking : " Hast seen, Master Watchman, a

pair of females and a man, on horseback, pass this way ? "

" Two females o' horseback ", said the watchman, " and a man o' muleback. The females wore neither porringer, coif, nor bonnet, the man a skull-cap——"

" 'Tis they, Fitz ! Give rein—— ! " and they were off—for Westminster, where from a clubman slumbering on a doorstep they understood that the fugitives had taken the way to Kew village ; and away they went, cantering through open Middlesex country now, under open heaven.

And now, " Why should I be constrained into the chase of my own wife-that-is-to-be ? " observed Mark Bonner, his mass of girl's-curls jumping in spasms on his galloping shoulders.

" Poor boysie ! "—from Fitz : " yet is it better to be constrained into a chase than chased into constraint, as thou well might'st be ".

" Wife that *was*, not is, to be, lad ", added Mac ; " what is a King, if he hath not right to the person of his subjects ? "

" I refer you for answer to *The Republic* of Plato ", said Bonner.

" Wah, Mac, *there's* a nut for thee to crack ! " cried Fitz delighted, sweat dropping from his bossy blue-white brow down the red of his face.

" A truce to thy Plato, lad "—from Mac : "the King is in earnest about this Laura, hark ye ; and have her he will, and droitly, say I ".

" Have her in her entirety he cannot ", answered Bonner : " for her mouth I have already kissed so sore, that she will howl, an it be but touched ".

Fitz slapped his thigh. " Is it not a philosopher, the boy ? doth it not take its whipping buoyantly, in light scorn of all things and Kings ? But nay, Mac, I fall not wholly in accord with thee : if the boy loveth his Laura, and Laura her boy, 'tis a nice question to which Laura belongeth——"

" 'Tis heresy, Fitz ; she belongeth certes to the King ".

" Well, have it so. But that Bess—Is she really sister to Laura, as thou said'st, boysie ? "

" Why, yes ".

" 'Tis Bess I think of, Mac ".

" What of her, Fitz ? "

" That lass, many a time in the inn's tap-room I have chucked her under the chin—lightly done it !—and knew not what I chucked ".

" Ay, 'twas a bold deed that, the taking of thy King's-letters ".

" But, Mac, consider that flight with her sister from the King ! Sure, there's not a ladyship of the land who, having a daughter with Laura's face, but would have hurried her to Court, that she might entice the eye of our jolly Harry. And Bessie Ford—a country wench—Oh, 'tis incredible ! Oh, it troubleth the eyes ! "

" Ay, faith, 'twas seemly done ; yea, I avouch, 'twas virtuously achieved ".

" She tumbled not to her knees, Mac, to thank Heaven that now she should have beech-lands and liverymen ; but she ran in fear, Mac ".

" Oh, I avouch, 'twas virtuously achieved—'twas seemly done ".

" Ha ! ha ! ha ! and I have chucked it under the——"

A " phoo-o ! " of laughter puffed out of Fitz's mouth ; but then, the redness of the laugh changing to mottled pallor, he grumbled : " Gross grampus I must have been ! Pah ! I have shame on it ! "

" Nay, Fitz ", said Mac, " but thou takest the matter with too much unction, coz, being prone, I perceive, to run into extremes ever, goring like a bull at one red grievance. Our concern is not to prate about the virtues of this Bess, but to get the girls for the King ".

Fitz put spurs to his animal, and answered not a word.

A little while afterwards, passing by Kew, he called halt at sight of lights in The Cross Hands. " Nay, Mac, no more

to-night ; I feel three blazing smarts on my body, and my throat screaks for a cup of clary ".

" Well ", answered Mac, " as you will. Who knows if we shall not find our quarry even here ? "

When Fitz began to bang upon the door with his dagger-handle, the landlord of The Cross Hands popped his forehead out of window to cry out : " What ! more o' ye this night ? " and instantly Mac breathed : " Fitz, I'll lay a ban-dog to a beagle that they are in this very tavern ".

Fitz made no reply ; but the moment the landlord appeared at the door, Mac slipped a broadpiece into his hand, whispering : " Mine host, we need to know—have a pair of bare-headed lasses and a man in skull-cap come here but now ? "

" Why, even so ", was the answer ; " they are now eating in the pantry yonder ".

" And to the pantry how many doors ? "

" One, opening into the buttery ".

" Fair and good. Say naught of us to these good folk on consideration of yet a rose-noble for yourself, but conduct us to this buttery ; and, as we feed, seek us out a length of rope. . . . Fitz, we have them, lad ! "

" Hast any Aliçant, landlord ? " Fitz asked.

" *Sh-h!* " said Mac, " talk low ; and, while we eat, mum, now. Bonner, make but one wilful sound, and I stick thee ".

" Well, Mac. But hast any Aliçant, landlord ? "

" Why, a pipe or so, my master ".

" Then, up with a flagon "—now following soft to the inn-buttery, where, in the midst of casks and cupboards, they sat lolling in attitudes of lassitude round a table, while mine host spread a dirty port-pane, and presented a haunch of veal, stuffed yern, roasted byster, with oats-bread ; whereupon the three, cutting with knives, and stuffing the mouth with forkless fingers, set about business, while under the table Mark Bonner swung a gay leg, humming inaudibly, his head presently dropping to the shoulder of Fitzgerald, and so, reposing sideways, ate.

" But ", cried Fitz suddenly, "a murrain on that landlord ! Will he never bring that Aliçant ? "

On which Macdonald bitterly hissed : " Fitz ! this is mad folly ", while Bessie Ford in the next room leapt, blanched, to her feet, whispering to Calvo : " The voice of Master Fitzgerald ! We are lost ! " and at once to the landlord, then lifting the pantry trap-door, Calvo said : " You descend to the cellar for wine, mine host ? "

" Yes ".

" Wine of what kind ? "

" Aliçant ".

" So you keep Aliçant ? Bring me a flagon ".

He had got out a bottle from his bag before the landlord came back up, taper in one hand and two pewter flagons grasped by the handles in the other ; and when the landlord had deposited the flagons on the floor to reclose the opening, and was preoccupied with carrying the trap-door to its drop, Calvo sprang up to him, and, taking one flagon, poured from his bottle a distillation of essential alcohol into the other flagon.

So that Fitz, as he drained his first cup, nodded the remark : " Boon and heartsome, this ! "

And Bonner, draining his, hummed quite aloud.

Mac drank with more deliberation, pondering his flavours ; but even *his* eyes swam.

And presently Fitz, draining another cup, cried aloud : " Ha ! ha ! ha ! " while in the other room Mauro Calvo remarked to his two : " *Now !* we dart with all our legs through the next room "—and darted, Laura after him, then Bessie. They were well in the centre of the next room before ever Mac started to his feet, and, even as he started, stumbled, Fitzgerald then cackling the red laughter of Alcohol. Dim as was the light, and wild her flight, Bessie noted and knew him ; got half a glimpse of Mac, too ; but, as for Bonner, his face was buried in Fitzgerald's breast.

At once Mac half-recovered his legs and dashed to the outer door after the fugitives : but there, barring his way,

stood Fitzgerald, staggering, with outspread arms, laughing, " Ha ! ha ! ha ! art after the little Bess, thou Mac ? Gamesome coxcomb ! 'Tis not Laura—'tis *the little Bess* thou would'st be after for thy little dainty wife. . . ."

Now Mac cast his arms round Fitz's carcass, but when, after a struggle, they fell together it was some minutes before he could wriggle himself free, and now ran staggering out ; but only to stand listening to a patter of hoofs going at a gallop into distance.

When he went back into the buttery Fitz and Bonner were inextricably cuddled on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV

AT HOUNSLOW

As fresh Aurore, of mighty Tithone spouse,
Unshut the windows of her large hall . . .
Gawin Douglas.

With dawn Bessie awoke after three hours' sleep at The Blue Bottle, Hounslow, hurried on her clothes, and, having put her lips to Laura's mouth, ran down to the inn's back, where, mounting on a bench, she was able to scan far back the London Road, now abandoned ; and she breathed with thankfulness the breeze of a balmy morning, then knelt there by the bench, crossed her bosom, pressed a kiss upon her thumb-nail, and " prayed ", her milk-white brow, lined with two curves of brown hair, bowed down to the woodwork, her hair sticking up behind in a little " natte " or plait—not long—long as a hand ; little eyebrow, little eyelash ; on her cheek-bones sharp carmine patches, her thin lips scarlet ; and long she " prayed ", to many saints —for Laura, for Mauro Calvo—and devoutly, with awe-struck heart—not as men and maidens " pray " now.

As she rose, she noticed far off a cantering dust, clasped her hands, and " Oh, Master Fitzgerald ! " she whispered, " if you knew what you are doing, you would not "—though, in fact, the dust was due to some other party of the seekers than Fitz's.

She was now about to run to rouse the slumberers, when she noticed a hole at one corner of the garden ; beside it, a dung-heap, bricks, old dust, and rubbish ; beside these, spades and garden-tools ; and, taken with a sudden inspiration, she went running within the inn.

Up to the room where Calvo snored, his bold forehead pallid in contrast with his black cap ; and knowing, for

he had shown her, that he had the King's-letters in a box in his bag, she took the letters, with them an ink-horn, pen, and parchment, and hurried to Laura's bedside.

Laura, deep in dreams, resisted the shaking of Bess with objecting elbow ; and Bess, who was minutes in waking her, then ran to a window commanding the London Road, only to behold the cloud of dust closer now ; however, even as she looked, the horsemen halted at another house—The Crown—which stood forlorn in greensward half a league nearer Kew.

So back flew Bessie to Laura, who sat nude, wantonly yawning in bed : and " Write, Laura ", said Bess, who had no alphabet.

Laura waited, while Bessie, seated on the bed's edge, perpended, seeking for expression ; until her little crimson lips twitched with wickedness, and she said :

" The real and only Fitzgerald—"

The other wrote with flourished letters : " The real and only Fitzgerald——"

" Is sure a gentleman ", said Bess.

Laura wrote it.

" Why, then, should he hunt down to death ", said Bessie, " two poor maidens who bear him only good will and good remembrance ? "

Laura wrote that.

" Sign : ' Bessie Ford ' ".

It was signed.

" Now, on this other piece, write : ' Here lie the King's letters taken from Master Fitzgerald's cloak ' ".

It was written.

Now Bessie sprang up ; wrapped the King's-letters, together with her letter to Fitz, in a bit of paper ; then darted out to the garden, dropped the packet into the hole, and began to shovel-in the dust and rubbish, sometimes stamping upon the mass, to consolidate it ; and on the surface, when this was finished, she fixed with a twig the words : " Here lie the King's letters ".

What within five minutes she had thus buried would require, probably, an hour to recover ; and in this way she counted upon delaying her chasers.

Now she ran in, woke Calvo, soon they were ready to set out, and when the wife of mine host rose from bed to take her reckoning, to her Bessie said : " Prithee, Mistress Perkins, if a stranger named Master Fitzgerald come hither to-day, conduct him to the hole in the garden. 'Tis a masterful great gallant, having a humoursome face *sans* hair on it, and eyes of a sky-hue that winningly twinkle. You could not miss him, for 'tis an Irish gentleman like few ".

Which thing Mistress Perkins promised : and the party set off, bound for Colnbrook.

CHAPTER XV

AT COLNBROOK

A man there was of religion
That was a poore parson of a town. *Chaucer.*

Since Calvo knew that his flight was now tracked by pursuers, it entered his brain that his best device would be to make them fly onward looking for him, while he ambled musingly behind them on his mule-back. Therefore he made the more haste through the scented air toward Colnbrook, where he had old acquaintance with a curate.

In that day when all travelling was by horse, everyone could stay in a saddle : so Laura's dark face flushed to carmine, her hair tossed lax, jollity was on her breath ; and Bessie, seeing her so, a flash of galloping loveliness still near her, was inwardly glad.

But remarked Calvo : " By all that's farcical ! here's a charming occupation for a man like me "—they were now moving slow down a stony path under over-arching foliage.

" Oh, 'tis your exceeding wondrous goodness, Master Calvo ! " said Bessie.

" A truce to my goodness, young woman. You have cause to talk of goodness, methinks—gadding cross England with two moppets on galloping tits, and a lot of silly mad cattle on my track ! What do you call that ? "

" Oh, Master Calvo, it is even exceeding abundantly gracious——"

" Well, well—don't distress yourself—don't you see you fret and pester me ? Everything gone to rack and ruin—all my plans—all gone. I had in my head the doing of—a thing ! And I was just getting ready an electuary for that old hag Gammer Welch's chest ; now, I dare say, the old

wretch will go to her grave. And here am I gadding England this blessed morning with a brace of young women—utter strangers to me—everything gone to Golgotha. And all through that mumping chuff of a King—my God ! "

Laura, behind, pulled a nose-grimace at the sage, while Bessie, shrinking painfully at every grumble, went with a bent and guilty head ; until now they were at Colnbrook, and from the top of the street, occupied by three cows strolling drowsily down it, they proceeded to the bottom, past the church, searching for the presbytery ; till an old gaffer, clad in a hempen gabardine, stepped from a door, to whom Calvo spoke.

" Is Father Anstrewther still the priest here ? "

" Aye ", answered the yokel.

" Where the pestilence is the presbytery ? "

" Why, yonder, back o' the church, behind the yews ".

But this proved unfortunate for them, for three hours after they had been received by the good Father, Macdonald by chance caught sight of this identical gaffer ditching by the roadside, and said he : " Hast observed a pair of girls, with a man, pass riding, gaffer ? "

" Ay, the same as went to the presbytery, no doubt ", the other said.

The seekers were three hours behind the fugitives, for the reason that it had taken Fitz some time to dig up the King's-letters buried by Bessie Ford, which letters Fitz had then tossed into the hand of Bonner for safety, since he himself foresaw more sword-play, and possible death ; but, as for Bessie's note—" The real and only Fitzgerald is sure a gentleman "—he had put that into his own hip-pouch : they had then taken horse, to pelt hard for Colnbrook ; and now down a foot-path through yews made paces for the presbytery, an odd-gabled manse, deeply buried in greenery.

To their knock the Father himself opened, a broad-faced old carle, rosy and portly, with an autocrat stare ; and aggressively he demanded : " What make you, friends ? "

Mac answered : " We seek a pair of girls and a wizard-man, Father ".

" By what authority ? "

" By the King's ".

" Deliver me your warrant ".

" We have no warrant ".

" Then are ye mere strolling Corinthians. Get you gone ".

" Nay, 'tis insolently said, Father. Abase, prithee, that high stomach. Are the maidens here ? "

" And if they be ? Here, Grip—at 'em, dog ! "

As the presbyter bawled it aloud, a big ban-dog bounded bristling from nowhere, and was sprawling in the air on the road for Bonner's throat, but then dropped in two wheeling pieces from the edge of Fitzgerald's sword. And now Mac : " Father, are the maidens here—yea or nay ? we take your sacred word ".

" I will not give it ".

" Then, we search the manse ".

The priest clapped three times.

" A signal to the girls, Fitz ! " cried Mac : " they are here ".

" In then ! " cried Fitzgerald with rising colour ; and, brushing by the old man, they ran ransacking, till one locked door stopped them—a portal studded with iron, bolted, entrance to a library.

" They are behind this door ", said Mac.

And Fitz : " 'Tis so, Mac ; but nothing less than a culverin could bring that down ".

" Hi, there, hi ! " cried Mac, battering it.

No answer.

And Fitz : " What now, Mac ? By the Rood, I have a brutal thirst : let's ravish the curate's buttery ".

" Nay, come : we get at them by a window ! "—running as he spoke ; but when, outside the house, they came to the windows which they took to be the library-windows, all were shuttered, and a depression in the ground like a ditch at the house-side there set the windows above their reach.

And Fitz : " So what now, Mac ? "

" Escape us now they cannot "—from Mac : " come—we seize their animals ".

Now they went seeking the jennets and mule, but here anew were defeated : only one old ass in the park ; no animals in two of the outhouses ; a third outhouse had a broad Norman door which was locked, and when Mac put his ear to it, no sound within.

And Fitz : " Well, Mac, what now ? Let's ravish the buttery ".

" No, to that inn there "—from Mac : " from yonder window we will have this outhouse under our eye, and in here, I'll wager, the animals are ".

So they started for The Harp and Pear hardly forty yards away ; but the Father, who had been watching them, jumping now to an unlucky conclusion, flew to the fugitives with the news that the searchers, failing to unearth them, had made off in further chase ; and the sage, taking it that his scheme had now succeeded, decided to abide where he was till nightfall, and then proceed peacefully on his way behind the three riders.

Meantime, Macdonald, feeding at The Harp and Pear, with the park of the presbytery under his eye, remarked : " Faith, Fitz, here's what I see not : wherefore threw they three good hours away waiting here ? "

" God knows ", grumbled Fitz.

" The good Bess tarried to confess at Vespers ", observed Bonner with his smirk.

" To confess her envy of the kisses her sister hath sipped of thy bee lips, boysie ", said Fitz.

" Nay ", answered Bonner, " 'tis rather *thy* rough warrior-busses that the Bess would be after : for she hath writ thee a letter of amorous challenge which chuckles while it mourns, for saith she, ' The real and only Fitzgerald is sure a—— ' "

" A truce to that, Boysie ! " says Fitz.

" But by the eleven virgins ! " Mac suddenly cried, " if the boy be right, after all ? If Bess hath not indeed tarried

to confess, but if, being for whatever reason here, she *do* confess ! "

" Well, what then ? "

" Why, then, we have her ! and, having her, we have her sister ".

" How have we her ? "

" Grammercy, we grab her in the church ! "

" Bah ! Bess is too wise a wype for that : if she be indeed bent upon confession, she steals like a wind to the church, and there lurks in some locked nook of the sacristy, till her turn come ".

" Then, as she kneels confessing, we seize her ! "

" But the old priest whisks her into his box, and locks us out ".

" Then, by blood and nails, we pinion the priest beforehand ! "

" Say'st thou ? "

" Aye, by thunder ! We lie in wait by the manse, and, as the old man goes out, why, we gag and bind him. Then I don his robes and run to the confession-box, there to wait till the lass comes kneeling : then I seize her ".

" Aye, 'twill do—*if* she come ".

" She will—'tis odds she will : the boy, who knows her manners, says it ; and 'tis her first occasion to confess since she stole the letters ".

" But 'tis *I* will don the Father's robes ".

" Thou ? . . . If thou wilt. Why not I ? "

" Oh, I know not . . . 'Twere like a morris-dance o' May-day to list to little Bess lisping confession ! "

" But, Fitz, thou wilt not fail the King ? "

" Fail ? "

" Once before hast failed him with his letters, lad : a *second* time were a wee too much——"

" Sure, 'tis not to me thou pratest, Mac ? By the sacred wounds, I'll pin the little minx, I swear, as brutally as a beagle his hare o' Christmas Eve "—angrily Fitz said it ; and Mac went : " H'm ! "

So all day they kept close in the inn, until the dusk fell, then stole out on foot.

And as the priest put out a foot from his door, he was seized ; as his mouth opened to howl, it was dumb ; then without a sound they laid him in a near room of the presbytery, after taking his hat, surtout, beads ; and Mac, having Bonner in tow, ran to lurk among the church-trees if perchance Bessie should pass, that he might seize her.

Bessie, however, sat already in the church—an hour before had gone openly to the holy place, to string together and lay up for herself in heaven that day a long litany and treasure of devotions.

As for Fitz, he rushed to the church in the dirty old frock of the Father, flitted into the sacristy, flung-on indiscriminately the old man's alb, chasuble, stole, hanging there, and thence dashed into the confessional—a den having two doors, and two grilles which were rigged with sliding-shutters behind, to blind or open them—and, after making sure that the doors opened freely, so that he could rush forth with ease, he took his seat, and drew a shutter wide, his little eyes twinkling.

Whereat came a village-wife, and, kneeling on a hassock outside, breathed " Prithee, Father, give me thy blessing, for I have sinned ".

Fitz muttered something, sitting with an averted face ; then murmured : " Say an act of contrition ".

Which said, she confessed to " scolding ", told of her part in a brawl, of a night of perry, of an opus carnis, and with beaten breast breathed her " Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa ".

Upon which Fitz muttered a monotone of nonsense, imposed in absolution a *chemin de croix*, and when the woman, with a look of question, went away, he closed that shutter and opened the other, where a woman knelt, confessed, and went away.

Then, with bent head, came Bessie Ford and knelt, with " Prithee, Father, give me thy blessing, for I have sinned "

—the very last glories of the sun-down now oozing through storied glasses to lotion her hatless smooth dome in a trance of hues.

Fitz's will was on the spring to pin her then and there, but his body did not respond : and, copying the priest's deep rasp of voice, he bid her say her Act.

She said it ; and then in a tone lowly as the zephyr's moan confessed. Her crimes were crimson-dyed in sight of Christ : she admitted two—the crime of theft—the crime of idolatry.

She had stolen some King's-letters from the cloak of a fighting-man to rescue her sister from his desires ; and she adored her sister sinfully, with even idolatrous craze, as the creature was not to be adored, only the Creator.

" But in thus abstracting the letters thou did'st treason to the King ", Fitz rumbled like the priest.

She muttered : " 'Twas for my sister ".

" And thou didst bring nigh the Tyburn-tippet the throat of the poor fighting-man from which thou stolest them ".

Her bent head bent lowlier ; her tones withered away to a whisper : " 'Twas for my sister ".

" So, it 'twere to do again, would'st do it ? "

" Why, Father, I fear—yea ".

" Then, art not truly contrite ".

" Oh, I am crooked as sin, I think, and the root of wrong is rank in me ".

" Not truly contrite, I say. What ! would'st again brave the King's wrath ? "

" Oh, the King's wrath, Father : that your poor penitent could lightly abye, if that were all ! The King's wrath frights me not a toe ".

" But the wrath of God——"

" Ah ! 'tis there, by my credit, my sickness is seen, good Father, since for that girl's sake I would even hurl myself to the damnation of Hell ".

" What ! and writhe in fire for ever under the pitiless pelt of Christ ? "

" Oh, 'tis my soul's flaw ! By my credit, 'tis my nature's fault, good Father ! "

" Why, 'tis a wondrous love ! 'tis a wild and deathly passion ! "

" She is my little sister—I die every instant for her . . . "

" 'Tis a rank idolatry ! "

" Father, 'tis a most wrong idolatry ".

" 'Tis a most noble idolatry ! "

" Say you, Father ? "

" 'Tis a most divine idolatry ! "

" Then, Father, you—— Oh, my heart ! But the theft, Father ? "

" 'Twas a glorious theft ! Oh, 'twas a most grand and arrogant theft ! "

" From the poor gentleman, Father, whose neck——"

" From the caitiff who would have taken from thee thy lamb ! 'Twas nobly done ! "

" 'Twas not, then, Father, a—sin ? "

" 'Twas most virtuously achieved—'twas highly transacted ! Only—that poor fighting-man—had'st thou no thought of all his plight ? "

" I had, yes : not then, but afterwards—even with tears ".

" What, *tears* ? "

Her voice dropped to a still lower whisper : " Why, yes ".

" For *him* ? "

Her lips moved, but without sound.

" What is his name ? "

" Garrett Oge Fitzgerald ".

" Thou knowest him well ? "

" Well ".

" And bearest him no hatred in thy breast ? "

" Oh, I ! none. 'Tis a gentleman of gallant and free temperament, Father, galloped on impulses. If any evil be within him, methinks it will not be deep—oh, no. Or it may be—I know naught of him ".

" Yet thou ' knowest him well ' ! "

" I think—I thought so. It may be—I know not at all,

Father. How should such as I know of a gentleman such as he ? He is this instant galloping after me as a goss-hawk hunts a linnet——"

" Why, 'tis most ugly done ! "

" 'Tis hard—'tis very hard. But, by my credit, I say not 'tis ugly done ".

" Oh, 'tis a most miscreant crime ! "

" He but obeys the King's behest, Father—the King's sworn servant ".

Now fell Fitz's fist down upon the chair-arm with : " A murrain on the dirty King ! "—in his natural voice—" Oh, generous Bess ! Oh, large and blessed Bess ! "

Bess then, for the first time, turned up her eyes to him ; and although it was too gloomy now to see, the hues oozing through the window-glasses having now gone dead grey, his voice she knew, and felt.

At the same moment he had made a motion to rush at her—a rush tragic enough in its results : for, whereas he had come to take her, and she had won him, his rush meant to her only that he had come to take her—an instinct that his expressions of sympathy were part of the trick flitting instantly through her head : and she was running like a roe—he after her.

She dodged him behind the sacrarium, then leapt the altar-rail ; and he, losing her in all that gloom, went trotting after her, lugubriously calling " Bess ! " and " Good Bess ! "—in vain.

Then, out he ran from the sacristy, his eyes wild with tears, into the avenue of trees, and when to meet him ran Mac and Bonner, at once Fitz clapped both his hands upon Mac's shoulders, holding him from him, but could give out not a syllable, a grip at his gullet struggling with his spittle.

" How now ! the girl, Fitz ! "

" Oh, 'tis the rarest spirit ! "

" Fitz, thou——"

" Hear a man, Mac——"

" Hast not failed *again*, Fitz ? "

" Hear me. We can't hunt her any more, nor thou, nor I. She said there was no ill in me, Mac ; that the ill in me was not much : ' oh, no ', says she ".

" But, Fitz——"

" 'Tis a very angel, Mac : she'd melt Beelzebub. Oh, if thou could'st hear but one half her gentle, gentle whisperings that I heard but now ".

Mac's gimlet eye glinted wisely betwixt its lids, strictly critical.

" Well, and what said she ? "

" She said that for love of the Sis, Mac, she'd brave, not only the rage of ten million little kings, but the everlasting wrath of God himself ".

" Well, 'twas boldly said ".

" And she said that like goss-hawks hunting a poor little linnet—a poor little guiltless linnet, Mac, coz—so thou and I were hunting her ".

" Said she that ? "

" The little thing, Mac ! little helpless soul, my friend. Oh, by God, no more, no more ".

" I avow, 'tis piteous ".

" Aye, but hear the whole, hear a man out : she said 'twas not foully done, Mac ; ' Nay ', says she, ' by my credit, I say not 'tis foully done : for they but do the King's behests, being his sworn men ' ".

" Said she that ? "

" She said it, Mac—seeking pretexts for unmanly tykes the like of thee and me ".

Mac's wise eye glided a little betwixt the lids, glinting, thinking.

" Well, 'twas finely said ".

" Then draw thy sword, Macdonald ! "

" And wherefore ? "

" Bonner, boysie, draw thy sword ! "

" But wherefore ? " reiterated Mac.

" To take oath with me, who am thy good friend and

gossip, Craigie Macdonald. Hunt her without me thou wilt not, sure ; and hunt her with me thou shalt not, by the Holy Bones. Swear, then, with me that we escort them to safety now, and always with our falchions do guard and champion them against Cardinal, or Pope, or King, with all their hosts. Swear—wilt thou ? "

" Nay, but this is rash impulse that will pass. Faith, I act not in that way, Fitz ".

Fitz cast his arm round his friend's neck.

" Come, Mac, come, coz—for me, if not for her. Soften that strong forehead, and be still your old friend's friend. Else draw thy sword and stick me ! "

" Fitz, Fitz ", said Mac, " hast weighed all the consequences of this change ? The King——"

" Consequences ! King ! But nay, Mac : men of rich blood think not of kings and consequences—never, lad, never ! A poor little thing in sore distress, most chaste, most gentle, braving all alone the potencies of the land that harry her, hath need of us. ' Consequences ', quotha ? "

Mac scanned the ground with a diagonal frown, perplexed ; but within five seconds lifted his head, his pressed lips smiling.

" 'Tis heroically said, Fitz ! But remember : I, if I swear, hold by my oath, not for a day or ten, but for ever ".

" For ever, aye ! There 'twas Mac that spake. Draw, draw, my brave ! "

In a moment more three swords, with a sound, leapt into the air, three mouths pressed the hilts.

" I swear ", said Mac.

" I swear ", said Bonner.

" I swear ", said Fitz.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ESCAPE

Fly, fair ladies ! Oh, fly, fly ! *Shakespear.*

" Our first gear ", said Fitz, " is to hie to the manse, and acquaint them that we are now, not against, but for, them ".

And Bonner, shaking backward his wriggling locks : " This night shall I see Laura ! and have long rendezvous with her beneath the trees ".

" And to-morrow night beneath the sheets, boysie : for the Father here shall wed ye ! . . . But who shall be my sweetheart when Laura takes thee from me ? "

" I will give thee the little Bess ", said Bonner with his smirk.

Fitz growled " Pshaw, boy ", and Mac went " H'm ", as they ran up wooden steps of a gable into the manse ; and Mac said : " What if they be gone ? "

" Bess cannot yet have returned from the church to bid fly," said Fitz, " for thou and Bonner must have spied her in the coming ".

Bess, however, *had* returned, had made a breathless détour, had burst into the manse with the word " fly " panting to fly from her tongue-tip ; then, seeing the priest lying tied-up on the floor, had breathed a bitter " Fie ! Oh, fie ! " with Fitz in her mind's eye ; and, wild as she was to be away, had tarried to free the tied limbs ; but a moment after, in the room where Calvo perambulated, the palpitating word had burst loose, and " Fly ! " she had cried, " oh, fly ! "

Hence, when the three searchers now approached the library-door, they saw it this time open, and, standing

before it, the old man, who tossed up his hands to spatter anathemas at them ; but Fitz : " Nay, 'tis useless, Father ; now we are nothing but your friends. Where lurk the girls and the wizard-man ? "

" Gone, ye lilburns ! gone, ye daws ! "

" Bah ! 'tis false——"

But it was true. The next moment, hearing the thud of hoofs, all rushed to a window to see the girls and Calvo just galloping off from an outhouse where the mule and nags had been hidden.

Fitzgerald sent after them a passionate cry : " Hi, Bess, halt ! " even as trees hid the fugitives ; then mourned : " And we without a blessed nag ! "

" To our inn, Fitz, for the steeds ! " cried Mac : " they ride but sorry tits—in ten minutes we catch them ".

So back to the inn they ran, were delayed some minutes in trapping animals, paying score, then sprang to saddle, and with lax rein were away.

As they started off, the landlord, lingering by the inn-door, remarked to a neighbour : " So God me save ! there be brisk riding about-country to-day, with one and another of them ! "

" What's stirring ? "

" 'Tis what I ask, too. Why, 'tis a very plague of scampering cross-country cavalcades this day, all seeking a pair of girls with bare head and a man in skull-cap ! "

Meantime, " Ride, Mac, like furies ! " cried Fitz : " miss them now we must not ! Spur, Bonner ! "

" If we miss them, captured they will be, wizard or no wizard ", answered Mac : " royal Harry will sweep the country with five, with fifty, thousand men, till he have them. Anyway, Fitz, we've entered on a biggish game of shovel-board ! "

" Give rein, lad ! "—going now in single file, hoofing a lane of dried mud, and in no danger of missing the fugitives, for they were moving right (though on a different path), and far finer horsed.

And when sudden sheen overspread the country from a risen moon, they being then on plain among meadow-lands, out cries Macdonald : " *There*, Fitz, are they—near ahead—to the left ! "

" I see. But——"

" Look ! " cried Bonner excitedly.

" Oh, they are pursued ! " exclaimed Mac : " there's fighting, Fitz ! "

Still further to the left than the fugitives, galloping upon the fugitives, rode a group of cavaliers, five in number—Percy of Northumberland and four.

There was nothing to do but cut them off by taking three hedges, a five-barred gate, and the intervening fields ; so over a bramble-hedge with easy vault slid Fitz, over after him Mac and Bonner, and now, with grim-driven rowel, they pounded the ground, bounding over two more hedges in supple succession, Fitzgerald ahead, until " Stop, or we fight ! " shouted Fitz ; but young Northumberland, not being of a mettle that stops, rushed on : and in another second sounded the shock of their encounter.

Percy's men, then storming through mid-field, were caught in demi-flank, and in a trice two riderless horses went trotting across the meadow ; Percy's other two fighting-men fastened upon Mac ; while the edges of Fitzgerald and Percy met. Bonner also had drawn brand, and, at the shock, shot one blinkard hack at somebody's panoplied back ; but then, as if of its own accord, his horse had backed out of it ; and now Bonner sat with lifted sword and vigilant eye and panting nostrils, as who should say : " 'Twere perilous to approach me, so prithee do it not ".

As for Mac, he had to do battle with a demi-lance on one flank, a bill on the other, under which conditions his defence was as defective as the light was dim : so, the lance having scratched his animal's shoulder, in the rear-up he received a wound through his mail on the breast-bone, and tumbled backward over his croupe.

But that moment would have been Northumberland's

last—for his battle-axe was wheeling away in the air, and Fitz had his two-handed steel heaved well-nigh behind his back to hew once, and so an end—when there rang out an affrighted cry of "Clubs! Clubs!" and the blow did not drop: a cry of Bonner's, upon whom Mac's two conquerors were riding; upon which, like tempest rushed Fitzgerald; and it was pernicious the quick succession in which the two men perished. Then at once he turned anew to Percy: but Percy saw, not only Fitz, but Mac on foot now running upon him; and, wounded in the forearm, and weaponless, he turned and fled.

And, as Mac's horse, meantime, had not scampered far, immediately the three started in renewed pursuit after the fugitives.

But in the thick of the battle Calvo, having cantered behind a hill, had there cunningly changed his course; and although Fitz, Mac, and Bonner ranged the country until far into the morning, the quarry was lost to them.

CHAPTER XVII

WANDERINGS

Dear is my little native vale,
  The ring-dove builds and murmurs there :
Close to my cot she tells her tale,
  To every passing villager.
The squirrel leaps from tree to tree,
And shells his nuts at liberty. *Rogers.*

In a week Calvo had traversed the spur of Berks which separates Bucks from Hampshire : and to not one of his seekers was either his course or his spot now known, although ever and anon, as he journeyed, gossipings as to cavalcades galloping hot and reining for urgent queries would reach his ears at taverns.

He came to Coxton in safety, a hamlet in the neighbourhood of Odiham, umbrageously buried in a Hampshire vale, where, arriving at matins, miserably tired, he dropped upon a mattress in a dim garret-loft—a grot of fragrant hay—whither guests were led : and the beauty's head drooped near his knee, her rose-pale lips opened their adorable petals, and breathed in sleep.

Bessie, however, did not thus tumble into slumber, and three hours later when Calvo and Laura awaked, no Bess was there : when they called, no answer ; Calvo fretted ; the animals, brought to the tavern-door, waited ; until at last Calvo, with irritable brow, walked round into the long inn-yard, cobble-paved : and there bent Bess by the pump, kneading with sleeves turned up a lump of " washing ", the inn-woman akimbo watching the work.

" Come there, come ! " cried Calvo peevishly : " you keep me tarrying ".

An " Oh . . . ! " leapt out of Bessie's mouth, as she flew, after one swift whisper to the inn-woman.

Calvo then asked the way to another village of the landlord, went that way a little, then dashed another way—a ruse to outdo pursuers ; and " What were you doing with that washing ? " he demanded on the way : for to Calvo, the most " unpractical " of persons, his " head in the clouds ", it did not occur that the fifteen crowns wherewith Bessie paid their way would fail.

Bess could not answer : in fact, she had besought the washing-job of the inn-woman to pay for Calvo's and Laura's bed of hay ; and Laura now rescued her from embarrassment by pointing out an aspiring lark, crying blithely : " O, 'tis minion ! the frolic chansonette ! "

" Silence, you, with your face ", said Calvo.

But at Witton, some leagues thence, concealment was no longer possible, when supper and perry could not be paid for.

" But, thou silly daw, why didst not tell me long since ? " demanded Calvo : " so that was the secret of the washing at Coxton, when thou wast sore travel-worn ? "

" Not that I was so travel-worn, Master Calvo ", says she : " for, by my credit, I have a tight backbone, though minion in stature ".

" Well, well. Thou art a Bess. We shall see."

So the morning after, Calvo slung his russet-leather bag to his back in a grum humour, and jogged out afoot, Bessie following astonished ; and he, seeing her, turned to observe : " This is rigolo ! that a man like me should go gadding forth to trap half-pennies like some zany or touring punchinello ! What hast thou done with all the money thou had'st, hey ? "

" Why, sir, 'tis a miracle—what with horses' provender——"

" And pasties for that maudit sister of thine, who eats like the seven elephants of King Sut, and thou thyself thinning like the Mater Dolorosa ! What atest thou yester-eve ? "

" 'Twas Friday, Master Calvo——"

" Nay, then, I have no further interest in thee and thy affairs ! Do as thou wilt, thou stiff and naughty spirit !

Friday, quotha ? 'twas not too much Friday to stuff thy sister with boiled picarell, and duck, and Rhenish—and myself also . . . Well, well ".

At the street-top Calvo, having got from the bag a little stick of brass, and a brass bowl of Hindoo embossing, beat with the stick a ran-tan on the bowl : and something pathetic there was in that beating in the street—out of keeping with those wise owl-eyes, and the bold brow under the savant's skull-cap.

By his side stands Bess, rather pale, her stick of hair—long as a hand—tied with a little bit of black ribbon, while faces begin to glance out of pigmy casements lovely as that old dead England, and Calvo taps his ran-tan.

And soon there was a movement tending toward him—as the moon the waves, so he drew them, such is the interest of man in man ; and now, a crowd round him, he hands the bowl to Bessie, and, eyeing them calmly, says he :

" I wish you joy, friends, of the blessed fortune which has brought me into your midst this day. I am a physicianer, instructed at the feet of the illustrious Magister Antonio Bartolomeo of Padua, who discovered the Philosopher's-stone. I am known at the Universities of Padua, Paris, Boulogne, Orléans, Montpelier, Salamanca and Bourges. I am a distiller of simples of every sort and species. I am a witch-finder, a necromancer, and a cheiromancer. I reveal the secret of the grand magisterium, and I sell talismans and cabalas, tessaras and amulets, that counteract the Evil Eye. I cure the King's-evil, and the Dance of St. Vitus. In this magic sack which ye here see is that orvietan, or miraculous Venice-treacle, which is the antidote for all poisons ; there is saltartare, argaile, cinoper, alkaly, and that arsenic, which, taken in small doses, protects from cold feet at night, but in large has just the contrary effect. There also is turmeric, gum-mastic, marygold, sorrels, burnett, rue, hartshorn, spavin, and every wholesome medicament that completes the mediciner's elaboratory. Come, friends, open your purses ; open, open.

For a groat I rub away the lumbago with that glorious unguent of the Magister Sachs of Amsterdam ; for a groat the sweating-sickness ; for three halfpence I strike down a cow with the plegia, by virtue of the world-famed abracadabra of the Persian Magi, or else by simple witch's-elm. Open, open : set briskly to it. Here are plasters, spasmadraps, waters, lotions, solutions, decoctions, ointments, poultices, clysters. I tell fortunes, not solely by palmistry, but by the stars, being taught to astrologize, or star-gaze ; and I eject cast-in-the-eye by the excellence of a magic sapphire-stone, found on Mount Ararat by the renowned Hasn-us-Sabah. Draw near : open, open. I see a good man yonder oozing rheum from the nostrils ; him will I medicine with an electuary of honey, olive-oil, and mint. Another hath the air of one who mourneth after a stray foal : I am a discoverer of stolen goods by the Greek method, and a tracer of strayed animals by the Syrian plan of slapping the spittle. Another, as I notice, hath a toothache, and the wrench of sorrow is in that wretched jaw : him will I cure with the panacea of the Dominie Y'hudah Benisrael, else will I draw the rotted fang with a waxed hemp fastened in a knot which is practised in the Lazarro at Salamanca. For you, gammer, with the haggard face and glassy eye, I have an elixir decocted from the Mexican calix——"

" Ha, ha, ha, 'tis all false ! " called a most weird wild voice, its laugh winding up in a wail.

Calvo looked up calmly. " ' Believe not all you hear ' is a good proverb, friends ", said he ; " yet ' Disbelieve not all ' were a better proverb yet. There now sits a young man on an animal who would have none of me, and my nostrums, and my catholicons ; yet that young man, credit me, is undergoing purgatory through every nerve of his face ; and, if he would but come to me, in twenty seconds would I, without recompense, send him laughing on his path ".

" 'Tis Flying Sidney ! " cried one of the crowd.

" 'Tis crazy Sidney Boleyn of Ormond ! " went the rumour.

He had come racing at frantic pace through the hamlet, and had drawn rein to hearken—a strangely emaciated lad, with the blank pallor of wax, with eyes wild, black, elfin, a ribbed suggestion of sinews notching his jaw ; and, his motions having the alacrity of a monkey's, the invitation was scarcely out of Calvo's mouth when Boleyn had thrown himself from his mare, and was before the sage.

" Here am I, quacksalver, cure me ! "—in his thrilling high cry.

" You perceive, he calls me quacksalver ", remarked Calvo to the people : " now we shall see ".

" Shall what see ? Zany ! Saltimbanque ! Charlatan ! "

" He calls me, you see——"

" Arlequin ! Polichinelle ! Buffo ! Pantalon ! "

" Calm your excitement. I am not altogether a pantalon —not altogether a charlatan ".

" Why, thou art ! "

" No. Am I right in saying that you have a torment, or neuralgia, in the face ? "

" Yea ".

" And this many a year ? "

" Since I was born ! "

" Swallow that ".

Now Calvo, having got out of his bag a box divided into squares, having from two squares taken vials, and mingled a few drops of their liquids in a piggin, presented the piggin ; whereupon Sidney Boleyn, with a wild hilarity of mockery and desperation, tossed the brown fluid down his throat.

There followed a space so long as when a man swallows some novel flavour and ponders upon the gulp, gazing at nothing, while the throng gaped silent, and Calvo dropped back the box of vials into the bag.

But now Boleyn, breaking into a passion of tears, dropped, as if shot, at the sage's feet, now after many years of distraction experiencing sanity, feeling peace.

Calvo patted that bent head, while Bessie's eyes welled with water of worship, and the half-wild boy knelt shaken with sobs, until, after some minutes, he lifted himself and walked away, without a syllable, down the hamlet with a hanging head, followed by his animal. And now Calvo : " So, good friends, you see . . ."

They had seen : so during an hour he drove a brisk trade, the browns raining into Bessie's bowl.

And as they walked to return to the tavern, Calvo remarked : " Well, now, you see, we are rich : no more hard washing, then, for little travel-worn lassies ; and the sister with the face shall gorge herself with pasties ".

" Ah, my master ", quoth she, " great you are, and *good* ".

" Well—But, hallo ! here is our man after us again "—for the wild wight was following, pervaded by his surprise of painlessness, pregnant with gratitude ; and said Calvo drily : " Well, does that go well ? "

" Yes ! yes ! "

" Don't call me charlatan again, then. What's your name ? "

" Sidney Boleyn ".

" Not a brother to the Lady Anne ? "

" A half-brother ".

" And what are you doing here, so far from Blickling and home ? "

" Oh, I am always far—I hardly leave the saddle—I fly always——"

" Well, poor lad ! keep heart. And when the pain comes——"

" It will come again ? "

" I fear so ".

" Ah !—But I reck not ! I have felt pleasure ! May I come—— ? "

" Nay, return to your home, taking these liquids, which will assuage the pain, if it return ".

He gave the drugs, and the youngster went reluctantly away.

CHAPTER XVIII

PALM SUNDAY AT MIDSUMMER

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray ;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. *Gray.*

From Witton, in a westerly direction, to Skipley Rising : where the three flyers spent a night.

The next day, on the way from Skipley Rising to Littlebush, passing between chalk ridges, they spied above them a horseman who, although he vanished, appeared to follow —Flying Sidney, caught in a sort of fascination for the magister, and hanging on his course, tracking him from point to point ; so that the three got to be often conscious of his flitting Jack-o'-lantern apparitions about the country, which here dips into a succession of vales, almost saucer-shaped, each a cosmos in little, dissolving afar in a mirage of azure haze, panoramas of rolling oak-lands, pasture and oat-field, uberance of orchard, brook, and bosky dingle, good to smell : the difference between now and then being a tremendous decrease now in the amount of forest and frondage, the villages then being well buried away in umbrages.

And still on ambled Calvo, from hamlet to hamlet, tending ever south-westward, day after day cheating his chasers, anon bringing forth his bag, tinging his ran-tan, and dryly prophesying lies that were partly true ; but at Mede Down, near about the centre of Arling Vale, he received a warning, when a little inn-chamberlain said to Bessie, " Surely you be the very souls with which a set of three gentlemen would be coming up ".

" Mamie ", said Bess, " oh my : and when were they here ? "

" Yester-eve, near compline ".

" And what asked they ? "

" Had we seen, ko they, ought of a pair of damsels ahorse with bare heads, and a man amule with skull-cap ".

" And how looked they, mamie ? "

" Two were martialists ; and one a stripling with rippling locks, and coral lips ".

Bessie thought of Mark Bonner, but could not imagine . . .

" What had he on for apparel ? " she asked.

" A princox sarcenet doublet, a velvet cap, threadbare hose——"

Bonner ! " And *he* was with the martialists, say you ? How looked they ? "

" One was small in comparison, but the other is big and broad-breasted, and goeth grandly with a swaggering, whereas the steps of the little one are quick and petty ".

" My mother ! it is they—— ! "

" Bessie, girl ! Come ! " called Mauro Calvo from below, who was going to harangue and gather groats ; and, as they set out, Bessie told him the inn-chamberlain's tale.

" Well, let the cattle come ", answered Calvo, " but let 'em come quickly, if they love their skin's salvation ! For, if I be not far at fault, there is coming, or has come, to England a sword that will make 'em skip a Morris-dance to the tune of *Placebo*, *Dilixi* "—a saying that puzzled Bess, to whom he had told nothing of his summons to Francis of France ; and now, laying down his bag, he began to rattle his ran-tan.

But the village was in a singular condition : knots of threes and fours discussed in the open ; yonder, by the church-porch near the green, sat two gammers with baskets containing box-twigs, and to everybody who came they handed a twig ; box-twigs were in windows, in gabardines, in the hand ; the church-bell was clashing in a tone of concern ; only a few lads and girls gathered to Calvo ; and soon they, too, gadded off to the church when the bell ceased bleating, leaving Bessie and the sage beneath chestnut-shadow where

the sun dappled the green with a vague wandering trellis-pattern. All was sleepy, still. A sleepy breeze brushed ruffling, with raids and multitudinous rumours, through the foliage of the umbrageous little village, as when faint airs move the hairs of some noonday slumberer.

" Well, now, what mean these cattle ? " demanded Calvo.

" By my credit ", remarked Bessie, " meseems as though they celebrate Palm Sunday ".

" What ! but this is not Sunday ; and we are nearer Midsummer than Easter : for to-morrow, if I mistake not, is the fête of St. Philip and James ".

Not a whisper within the village : only, yonder overhead, through the ocean of foliage brushed with soft rushes the throng and troop of the breezes, streaming in torrents of rumours, in conspiracies of whispering which breathed " *Sh-h-h !* shibboleth, shibboleth ".

" Let us to the Church, and see what is doing ", suggested Calvo ; and, shouldering the bag, he set out, to find the little building crowded, and a big-bellied Augustinian with tiny eyes, blubber lips, tonsured skull, explaining that he had called them together that morning for their souls' salvation : for, that year, he had announced no Lent ; and he was there now to tell them that, things being as they were on this sleepy sphere, that was the day, though not a Sunday, for the Procession of Boughs, and the next Sunday, he decreed, should be Easter Sunday—he had, in fact, dozing through that particular nook of sixteenth century Time in which his life was cast, wholly lost count of saint-days and feasts, his calendar had run crazy, the Year having become to him a bore and a muddle, and only the Day sweet and soluble—nor was there anybody in Mede Down to rouse him ; but on that particular day in his stream of days there had arisen an Event : he had received a letter with a date.

When he had noticed the date he had opened his little pig's-eyes wide, and when his glance fell on the sage standing in the nave he stretched forth his forefinger, crying out : " My children, seize that man—— ! "

For the letter with the date had been handed him that morning by a horsed messenger from one Mr. Justice Shelton, of Alton : and now Calvo knew and felt the length of Thomas Wolsey's arm, longer than Monarch's arm, Wolsey, for his own political ends, having lately sent messengers over England to every High Sheriff of a County and Constable of a Hundred, with instructions that these in turn should send to each Headborough and Justice, and these again to every Reeve of every Abbot, and through the reeves to every priest of every parish, describing Calvo and the maidens, and directing their arrest : so that several thousands of persons in England were now on the look-out to effect the arrest of the wizard and the girls.

And at once, as the oblong finger of the Augustinian Brother dropped upon him, Calvo guessed the facts, and perceived that now at last his feet were in the net.

But, although all the church was at once in a flurry and whirl of mind, those tumble-down eyes of the sage remained calm ; and before any of the yokels could move, he, whispering to Bessie " follow me close ", stepped forward with swift decision to the altar—the Brother beholding him come with alarm, holding up both rebutting palms ! but ere he could run the seer's lips were at his ear :

" I am astonished at you, Brother Augustinian, for your manner of shepherding the little flock here. It is incredible to me that you should have the stupid crudity to introduce Palm Sunday into Midsummer in this wise ! And no Lent, quotha ? And no Good Friday ? And the souls of the poor sheep perishing for the hunger which they have of the ordinances of Christ's Church ? Fie ! Fie ! A fine tale, verily, to tell the Bishop ! And to these poor sheep if now I turn and announce how matters stand ! and that your motive for wanting my arrest is but terror of my honest tongue ? Keep them here, therefore, during a ten minutes' space, till I be away, or it were a sorry case with you, I promise ! "

The tongue of the Brother poked his sheepish cheek, as the sage paced toward the vestry-door, leading Bessie,

while a movement toward pursuit among the pews was waved back by the Brother, who stood making soothing remarks.

So within a few minutes the fugitives were galloping from the village, the seer angry. For whither now to fly ? England was divided up into squares like backgammon, each square a trap to catch him.

And : " This should be Wolsey ", he said, " that bladder of hog's-lard ! It is Wolsey, it is like him, the pork. Why the deuce don't you ride, you two ? for, look you, I have had enow of you by now, young women, methinks—both of you—you, Bessie, with your ways, and that daw, your sister, with her face. It is rigolo—it is rigolo—this scampering over the creation by a man like me with a pair of hussies on tits, and all the shallow-pated chuffs of Christendom on my track ! But wait—wait : perhaps I have yet a card to play . . ."

For Calvo knew by this time that his pursuers were numerous, divided into groups, some, in some manner, in antagonism to others, and a plan for trapping them all to their bane had formed vaguely in his brain : for which cause it was that he travelled south-westward always, in the direction of Winchester, and of Southampton.

And suddenly, as he was scampering from that hamlet, the plan settled into definiteness : for suddenly there came to him definite tidings, as a horseman, racing in the opposite direction, almost collided with him—Flying Sidney Boleyn.

Boleyn's blanched face flushed, his elfin eyes fell, at sight of Calvo, who said to him : " Well, now, you see, you want to gallop me down, who have done you good. Whitheraway now so fast ? "

" To London ! "

" And wherefore ? "

" To tell the King of the strange knight and his exploits ! "

" Ah . . . ? "

" My father has sent me with a dispatch, and I——"

" Soh ! Which strange knight ? "

" You have not heard ? Yet he is near . . . Oh, I could not tell you—'tis past belief ! "

" Nay, tell me ".

" He is from across the sea, and his ship lies in Southampton Water, for I have spied her. Such a ship ! crazily glorious ! her sails cloth-of-gold, damasked, she painted all gold and azure, her four masts and bow's sprit all square-rigged—a hundred and ten guns in portholes on a battery-deck and on two gun-decks fore and aft, she having eight hundred tons in burthen, as I guess, near equal to our English *Henri Grace à Dieu*—and from a mast there ripples out a strip of silk marvellous large and exorbitant, sky-blue, with a fleur-de-lys—"

" Very good ! Continue ".

" And she hath, O, for her figure-head——"

" Never mind the ship : tell of the man ".

" 'Tis the wildest——! 'Tis a wight most lank——"

" 'Tis Francis of France ", muttered Calvo : " good ; 'tis he ".

" Lank, and his purpose, guess you, is to search out some perfect girl—as it seems from the queries which he everywhere makes—in the vicinity of Winchester—one marvellous fair above all flesh—perchance this very damsel with you, as I have thought ; and since he was not long in hearing that others, as it seems, are seeking this very Helen, neither was he long in meeting them, some or all ; and that broil, I, Master, saw, and 'twas royster, O ! "

" You saw it ? "

" 'Twas not far from here, near Penton, and yester evensong ".

" How many were with the knight ? "

" Seven only, and of the others seven—Oh, by the Rood, I'm all afire at the thought of it ! He rides a battle as a buoy rides the boisterous brine ! With his own arm I marked him now down four as summary as a hunter jumps a hedge. Oh, triumphant is his sword ! "

Calvo chuckled. " Well, I suppose the chuff will do. You know him, then, by sight ? "

" Know him like my mother ! though he wears a fluted Milan visor——"

" Could you find him ? "

" Why, yes. His band carry a vast banner of azure silk with one fleur-de-lys, and from a window of every inn whereat he stays out trails the ensign ".

Calvo's mule then standing close by Laura's horse, the sage chucked a finger under the beauty's chin, holding up her face, investigating with a musing gaze the truth of the rumour of its beauty ; and he muttered : " Yes—that will make a fool of him ; but he must *see* it to set his zeal aflame " ; and to Sidney Boleyn he said : " If *I* beg you to turn back for me ? "

" Why, most gladly——"

" Can you tell me of some river or stream near by, with good high banks to it ? "

" Why, the little Renny, a mile on the yon side of Chipping, hath that ".

Now Calvo dropped from his saddle, got from his bag paper, ink, a string, and scribbled against his saddle :

" To Francis the First, King of France, from Mauro Calvo these presents.

" If Francis the King will perambulate alone close by the water's brink of the stream Renny, near the village of Chipping, to-morrow even at the crepuscule, or it may be the morrow after, this day being a Thursday, then, Mauro Calvo will, by his science, so work and elaborate, that Francis shall have if only a sight of that most surpassing damsel of all, of whom Mauro Calvo long agone prophesied to Francis the possession and jouissance ".

He fastened the missive, handed it to Sidney, saying : " You will deliver this to the Knight in person, and will not mention that I am hereabouts "; upon which Sidney, pocketing it, kissed with awe the seer's fingers, and the next instant was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RENDEZVOUS

> . . . fairy damsels met in forest wide
> By knights of Logres or of Lyones,
> Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellanore. *Milton.*

> Therefore sayd Arthur unto Syr Bedivere
> " Take thou Excalybur my good swerde . . ."
> *Malory.*

The plan that had settled into definiteness in Calvo's head when he heard of the advent of Francis was this : He would first give to Francis a glimpse of Laura, in order to spur his ardour to a gallop, then would hurry backward some leagues, sleeping in woods, and seeking by all means to cheat the huge, hundred-handed arm of Wolsey, then would anew advance upon the neighbourhood of Francis ; but this time, as he fared through each village in haste, would take care to leave behind him information as to his next destination : thus would he be sure to draw together upon his track all the pursuing parties, and thus would lead them all upon Francis for destruction at the hand of Francis, or at the hand of each other, or both.

His mounted and martial enemies having thus been disposed of, he hoped by disguises, sleeping in forests, and precautions, to elude the civil watch-dog of Wolsey as far as the coast, at which he might obtain a boat and sail for French land.

That night on which he sent his rendezvous to the French King, the three slept in a wood of oaks, six miles south of Mede Down ; and here Laura felt a pang of that vacuum that her nature abhorred.

Yonder the picketed nags cropped grass and broom ; and anon, as they moved a foot ahead, smote a hoof ; and, close

by, a brook's music rumoured all night of gnomes' doings through the moonless gloom to the sisters, who lay naked in the blanket from Bessie's bundle—the bed-custom everywhere then, as still in the Latin lands—they being by themselves, the seer having strolled some distance to rest on a slope, where, as he had lowered himself, he had muttered for vesper-prayer : " This is rigolo, my God ! "

Bessie's orisons were longer, and must have shot loftier ; but, as she scuttled into the blanket to Laura, quoth the beauty : " But what a life is this I lead here, our Saviour ! following that old hoball about, into woods and all. Phew ! —thank you, sirs—not for me ".

" Why, Laura ! " says Bess.

" I have a horrible hunger. 'Tis too much to expect of me, at the end of the tale ".

" Oh, my dearest life, don't say anything !—do, Laura —bear with me—"

" And why should I lead this life ? Phew ! I have a fair face, at the end of the tale—I am a well-made maid——"

Bess was up on elbow. " What art talking about, girl ? " —with knit brows puzzled.

" Many and many a gallant, rich and high, the King's self, were glad to have me——"

" *Silence !* " Bessie hissed with an intensity that instantly quelled her sister. But the beauty under her breath went " Phew ! "

There were some soundless moments now, during which Bessie, frowning, leant on one elbow over Laura, poring over her in the darkness, till Laura mourned : " I have a hunger . . ."

" My mother ! but if I have nothing to give thee ? "

" Well, let it pass. Thou'dst give it quick, if thou hadst it, I know, Bess ".

Down dropped Bessie sobbing upon her, wrapping her passionately close, sobbing, till they both succumbed to the mood of the jews-harps of slumber, behummed and hushed by that shibboleth of the ocean of timber in motion.

All the next day Calvo and Laura tarried in the forest, only Bessie going out to a hamlet to get some food. Then, at curfew, Calvo informed Bess that he proposed to take Laura a little distance ; and though Bessie's nostrils gaped once in vague dismay, to her what the seer did was well.

But the fair one on the way complained lackadaisically. " Oh, I am fatigued ! I can't walk far ".

And Calvo : " Your fatigue, I assure you, is of no consequence : come, walk, walk ".

Through Chipping, and yet on ; tracking the prattle of the Renny, from which on both sides rose cliff ten to twenty feet high, leaving below a footway of moss along the water-side ; and Calvo, having selected a spot where the river-cliff was steepest and close to a greenwood, there spoke gravely to the fair.

" A Person ", he said, " will presently be appearing down yonder at the water's edge, upon whom I would practise a jape. You are to understand that one flaw in the carrying out thereof will be followed by the very gravest consequences, so be intelligent and attentive—if so be you possess such qualities in your pate. You will stand at this brim of the cliff during two minutes from the moment when the Person turns the bluff yonder and observes you ; then you will drop suddenly prostrate ; and, as you drop, you will pour forth the contents of this bottle ; then, bending so low that he notice you not, you will 'scape to that point of the wood there, where I shall be, awaiting you. All is simple—there need be no error—you know the English tongue ".

And she : " But wherefore all this ? "

" Silence, you : take this ".

The scientist put into her hand a vial full of the fluid bromine, from which, when poured out, mounts up a profusion of brown fumes : the idea being to convince Francis that the vision of Laura had vanished in an incense—leaving a smell behind. For Francis differed from Henry in that he was a real believer in the operations of witchcraft, of

Mauro Calvo's above all, who, long ago, had gained a strong ascendency over the French King's credulities : which thing Calvo knew.

So, then, the fair one takes her stand ; Calvo backs away into the timber. Unfortunately, half-an-hour passed, no Person came, and the waiting became irksome to the girl. She pouted ; her right ankle, which was not strong, jerked outwards ; she said : " What a life ! 'tis too much to expect of me, at the end of the tale " ; she forgot the vial in her hand.

But then he came—fifteen feet below her on the moss-path, on the same side of the water—stalking he came, tall, in armour, but without visor, a lot of glossy black locks glancing round a countenance brown like sere leaves, hairless, lean as the east-wind—a face not good—some hint of the he-goat in it ; only, the eyes were fine, and glanced battle with a black and gallant glow.

But what a bow !—an out-wave of boundless slavishness —princeliness of the Palace of Armida ; then, starting back, he shaded his eyes ! in the pretence that her brightness blinded him.

" Pretence " at first, when he had only imperfectly observed her : in some moments more he was truly dazzled : for her face was great, and related with the sun and moon.

He had never yet seen the like—could scarce believe his eyes—made some steps nearer to peer and wonder, and although the twilight had deepened, he could see her pretty well, standing there regarding him rather aghast, with gaping nostrils, her spirit and posture on a sort of startled tiptoe.

His next instinct was to rush, and snatch, and ravish : nor was Francis a man to tarry ; and she, seeing him rush at her, with a scream was running.

And. as she ran, having a kind of subconsciousness of the vial in her hand, she tossed it away off her : but it fell into a bed of nettle and did not break.

Many men could hardly have scaled the wall of cliff at

all ; the king was over it in half a tick ; and ere Laura had half reached the greenwood and the seer, she was shrieking in his grasp.

Francis was away, trotting with her as one trots in haste with a burning barrel, till at the hollow where his horse cropped he dropped her, sprang to his saddle, and, as she ran, he with a stoop plucked her like a tulip at a canter ; then with loose rein he was racing, she, meanwhile, beating with sweet provocation upon his grim visage, wriggling, calling, her face all inflamed, upon "*Bessie !*" and upon "*Master Calvo !*"

Within some minutes he was speeding through a forest, his steed a war-horse of Norman blood, more massive than fleet, the battery of whose hoofs was strong and ponderous : which, perhaps, was why, as he galloped into a glade, he called fire from heaven, horridly pestered : for yonder from a nearly opposite avenue, came three cavaliers, pelting upon him.

These were Fitzgerald, Macdonald and Bonner, who, at Mede Down, had even now been hearing that another party of six had hardly ten minutes previously left Mede Down, taking the way to the forest ; and with free rein the three had started out after them, the six being Alvarada, Sir John Perrott, and four Queen's-men ; and, passing through the forest in pursuit, the three, attracted by the battery of the Norman blood's hoof-beats, had deflected their course, and now came galloping upon Francis in the glade.

The impetus of the double advance was terrific : for Francis, seeing that he lacked space to rein and run, dashed on, persisting in his hold upon his captive, managing by help of his elbows to draw, so that, at the impending crash of those onrushing steels, Laura sent through the wood one impassioned shriek, which took the form of the bellow "*Bessie !*"

And this cry Bessie, hardly two hundred yards away heard and knew : as a young mother the cry of her child, as a shepherd the cry of his ewe, she heard and knew it . . .

" Oh, my mother—! "

In a flutter, white, the girl flew to her nag, tightened its girth, and galloped up one avenue—she knew not why, for the cry had come from the heart of space, the depths of nowhere.

But a minute before ever Bessie had mounted Laura was already free, having tumbled to the ground a moment before the meeting of the brands ; whereupon, terror granting her strength, she, gathering herself up, went running wild with a white lovely face through the wood, while, Greek with Greek, Fitzgerald and Francis met.

Now, King Francis had a sword (made for him by the famous artist of Toledo, Sylvester Avara), whose steeling, though tempered to a fanciful pitch of perfection, was near " dead-hard ", and in any hand but Francis' would have splintered at a hit ; in *his* " neither keen nor solid could resist that edge ". But its core being of Swedish iron, it could be bent into an ellipse, which, at the instant of release, flitted back into straightness ; and it presented in daylight an appearance of rippling silver.

Two chops each, on steeds that stepped circling, head to head, they made—the four ineffectual, save that a gap notched Fitz's edge ; and, informed by that instinct by which champions feel their match, they drew deep breaths, hundred-eyed, full of plots, Francis having Mac, too, attacking in flank ; and though Mac's sword dropped cut when Francis, by a double-wheel of his blade in air, met it descending, Fitz in that instant was hissing " Now ! " But, as his hack came down, Francis carelessly bowed, as when the moon stoops through a downy cloud, and Fitz's blow slipped upon the King's back-piece ; now, however, his back was Fitz's : but before any new cut the two were torn apart by a tempest of force when Alvarada and five at flying rate raced up.

And, as there was still sufficient glimmer in the gloaming to distinguish shapes like ghosts, at once it was evident that the entire new group of six were concentrating upon

Francis, with design, the venom of their weapons, so that he fought surrounded by them ; and now the sight was like a wine to watch the warrior's wiry rage : for, though his fate was sure, he at each instant having at least two steels to deal with, in perhaps twenty seconds he had beheaded one horseman, and sent another armless ; and at a light and almost flippant flick of his flying edge which sent Sir John Perrott's cap pirouetting high, out cried Fitzgerald, the fighter : " Why, lightly done, Sir Knight—bravo ! 'Tis an assassination this——"

And with that outcry the bout was all but decided : for Fitz, shouting " We fight together, Sir Knight ! " rushed into the row, and with him Mac, who had snatched Bonner's sword.

It was precisely then that Flying Sidney Boleyn, posting hot to London with news of Francis for King Henry, drew rein, and watched how Fitzgerald cleft to the breast a martialist of Queen Katherine, and how Francis sheared to the bone Sir John Perrott's bridle-arm, whose horse then bolted to gallop from the glade, Macdonald chasing him ; whereupon the one Queen's-martialist left alive, losing heart, took to flight, hacking, as he galloped-off, the back of Bonner's nag ; and Alvarada, finding his life alone with the swords which he judged the two shrewdest in Europe, turned, too, and spurred ; upon which Flying Sidney watched Fitzgerald and Francis vanish in chase behind him, and galloped away anew on his pounding way, bound for London, big with news.

Meanwhile, Sir John Perrott, seeing himself hotly followed, drew a blunderbuss to send at Macdonald a shot which entered Mac's mare's brain ; and at about the same moment, Alvarada, who had fled a different way, and rode a swift Arab, dodged his pursuers down a path, and escaped : whereat Fitz and Francis drew rein, Francis now turning upon Fitz with his large bow, and " La ! " says he in mincing lisping English, " I have to tender you thanks, comrade : to you I owe the saving of my life ".

" And the losing of a wife ", said Fitz twinkling.

" La, so true ! But as I have ninety wives, and but nine lives, on the word of a knight "—he half said " king "—" I tender you good thanks. You fight well ".

" Tush ! " said Fitz, little knowing to whom, " 'tis nothing ".

" But if *I* say 'tis something ? And—'tis my will that you accept this sword of me ".

" Why, nay——"

" No nays, prithee, lest I call you neighing ass, for this blade which you refuse hath but one brother in all the earth, and that, too, is mine. Take, sir ! "

His tone was both *bonhomme* and commanding ; and Fitzgerald with a blushing brow obeyed. " 'Tis a most gracious gift . . . "

" La ! as to that, say nothing. But learn it nicely in soft practice, I warn you, or it will shiver in your hand. And now my good will, and *au revoir*. To our next meeting, sir ! Ha ! Ha ! "—galloping away, and Fitz back to the glade.

But, to Fitz's astonishment, Mac was not there, and Bonner had vanished : for Bonner, being horseless, had raced after a stray nag that, after the battle, had passed trotting through the glade ; but the nag, with stoppings to crop, and runs, had refused capture, had seduced him far ; and he was now, as Fitz waited, trying in vain to refind the glade.

With hot impatience Fitz lingered some half-hour, puzzled, not knowing that either Mac or Bonner had lost horse. Then, " Perchance are they gone onward to Chipping together ", he thought : and started for Chipping.

As for Mac, when he got back to the glade on foot, and saw no one, he concluded that Fitz and Bonner had gone back to Mede Down, and thither set out on weary foot.

At the same time, Bonner, in the midst of his hopeless tramp, flung himself, desperate, upon a bank, and slept a supperless night in the forest—the three thus mutually lost to one another.

As for Laura Ford, as she ran with a blanched face from the battle, her flight had led her to the spot which they had made their home for a night and day, and, recognising it, she stopped ; but Bessie was not there—had gone out after that cry which she had heard, and known ; and " Bess ! Bessie ! " Laura called cautiously.

Suddenly she heard urgent hoof-beats—approaching : only the hoof-beats of a riderless horse in flight from the fight ; but fear seized her : " Our Saviour . . . ! " quoth she ; ran to where the animals cropped, fastened her palfrey's strap, sprang, and was away.

Some ten minutes later the sage came from the river, fingering his chin, lingering and guilty, thinking : " Whatever can I find to tell the elder sister ? That silly daw— ! "

But when he came Bessie was not there—the two nags gone. He held his chin.

" In that case ", he reflected, " Laura must have escaped from Francis, and now gone somewhither with Bessie. But whitheraway ? And why ? Or are they captured ? Taken to Mede Down ? Or Chipping ? "

He walked to and fro, bent, holding his chin, quickly.

" I pity her from my heart ", he muttered ruefully.

Inquietude would not let him be still : he mounted the mule, to make for Mede Down.

And about a half-hour afterwards came Bessie back, weary of seeking : no one there ; and " I can't find her ! " she moaned : " Oh, surely, something is against me . . . ! "

Then away afresh, with her bundle, she rode.

CHAPTER XX

HENRY HEARS

De quelle manière Ulrich Gallet fut envoyé à Picrochole.
Rabelais.

Henry was on the river when Flying Sidney arrived at the Placentia Palace—at Greenwich, for the "sweating-sickness" was abroad, a bane of which the Royal Harry had a headlong horror: so at every fresh outbreak in London he would pack in a flurry for the palace at Windsor, at Richmond, or Greenwich.

It was mid-day, an hour after the royal dinner—for Royalty, then as now, "dined late" at eleven a.m., ten being the more ordinary time of the forkless feast—and Henry sat canopied aft on a large-prowed barge brave with cramoisi velvets whose frounces trailed, drawing on the water two lines which widened and wavered away to their death on the brindled breast of the river, fading in it just as the trail of that lazy Summer-day, with its lazy airs, and its spacious lazy pleasance, has faded to-day in the tide of Time; and with Henry sat the two Howards (Edward and Edmond), Knevet (Master-of-the-horse), and some gentlemen-archers and body-knights. They were at West Ham when Sidney, having got a skiff at the Palace landing-steps, boarded the barge, hanging on forward, to send word astern that he bore a dispatch from Sir Thomas Boleyn; and soon he was before the King, who, as he scanned the dispatch, his left leg stretched stiff, elbow on right knee, gnawed a wry-pushed pout at his mouth-corner, took-in with his tongue-tip a moustache-end, to gnaw; and "H'm!" went he, and again "H'm!", and at last "Ha!"

For Francis and Henry were lifelong rivals in the two

pursuits of both—Love and Battle. As to both Francis groaned at the growing fame of Henry ; as to both Henry raged at the established fame of Francis. In the matter of Battle indeed, it seemed to be rather conceded that Francis was the better man—although it was believed that with the bow-and-arrow, and in barrier-combat with axes, Henry had the palm ; but in the matter of Love, the question of supremacy was more contested : here they remained the patterns and paragons one of the other : if Henry was dragon, Francis was ogre ; if Henry was Cæsar, Francis was Alexander ; they surpassed each other.

So, " *Ha !* " went Henry; and, turning upon Flying Sidney : " Well, what's all this ado ? Hast seen this knight, thou ? "

" And his ship ! "

" Ship ? How looks this ship ? "

The Flyer described the gaudy argo : and, since only kings possessed such ships, Henry, turning from side to side his nodding head, went : " Well ! "

" A thing of glory, Sire—damasked sails of gold-cloth——"

" And this knight's self, varlet ? "

" Lank, Sire, and he *fights*, Sire——"

" Ha ! "

" With a giddy gallantry, Sire : fights like the lark scattering her rollick carols, ha, ha——"

" Thou brazen— ! And with who fights he ? "

" Why, with the different cavalcades that are seeking the maiden ".

" Cavalcades ? Maiden ? *Which* maiden ? "

" The maiden called, as I hear, Laura Ford ".

" Aha ? . . . 'tis so ? "

" The cavalcades——"

" *Which* cavalcades ? "

" The several that are after the girl, beside Fitzgerald, Macdonald, and Bonner, who now fight on the knight's side——"

Hs

" Fitzgerald ? But he is *my* man ! fights, say you, on *the knight's* side—— ? "

" Aye, I have seen him, Sire : he, too, fights like——"

" Then the dark gizzard of that louse for it ! 'Tis the *second* time—And 'tis this same maiden that the knight also is after ? "

" Why, yea ".

Henry sprang up with a stamp. " Oh, come, my gentlemen, this is a bit over-much—by the glory of God ! Sniffing after my own subjects, the goat, in my own God's land ? My own, own England, which is mine from Heaven's height right down to Hell ? "—up to heaven he pointed and down to Ota-heat-i— " Round with the prow there ! You see, my gentlemen, how this Frenchman, this ' good friend and brother of France '—seeks a brigue with me ? Well, let him have a taste of English iron, then ! To arms, I say ! Dig it with the oars, there ! Well ! "

Round went the prow, while Flying Sidney paddled back to the palace, vaulted upon his spent horse, and was away for the Bridewell Palace of Katherine, bearing a letter from his father to his half-sister, Anne—the one being of whom he stood in fear : and at once Anne, setting him before her to fix him with her keen blue eyes, was inquiring : " You have seen this knight, Sidney ? "

" Yes, mistress ".

" Describe him ".

Sidney did, and instantly she muttered : " Oh, 'tis Francis " ; then, having gathered every detail, she moved to a casement, gazing forth at the blooming manor-close, hands behind her back ; and " So, 'tis Francis ", she muttered.

And she knew Francis : knew that, if he caught Laura Ford, he would hardly fail to possess ; nor, if he possessed, could Henry ; and, until Henry possessed, she was convinced that the queenship would still flee her seizing.

When she left her station at the casement it was with a reigning of the staggers in her gait, to pass into a parlour

where the Queen, with six ladies-in-waiting, wrought in seven pieces a Flanders tapestry ; and there " Oh ! " went Anne, and again " Oh ! "

" Why, lady——" from the Queen.

" Madam, Oh ! "

" Why, lady, are you ill ? "

" Madam—I fear—I have the sweating-sickness ".

" Heaven's pity ! sayest thou ? "

" Madam—I pray you—let me depart straightway to my father—— Oh ! "

In fifteen minutes she was on the journey, with Sidney and a servitor ; and two hours later Henry himself was *en route* with a hundred and ten—brigandined archers, scarlet-doubleted yeomen with halberds, catafracts with partisans, arquebuse, pike and caliver, swordsmen, mounted billmen, axe-men ; among them Knevet, handsome Charles Brandon, dissolute Thomas Howard, Lord Nevil, fighting-men all, with fames.

Down through the town trailed like a snake the procession, showering a prolonged prattle of pattering hoof-falls, Henry in disguise behind, glorious on a charger of which the bases and bards were emblazoned with roses and pomegranates of gold, while before him a marshalman bore a white banner of silk exhibiting St. George in scarlet.

And Wolsey, who had been forewarned of the departure, prying from his Bridewell Palace, eyed the train stray through the Strand, hearing the pattering rattle of hoof-beats raining : and, bridling his fat neck of pride, he smiled his little superior smile.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TWO KINGS

> . . . tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,
> Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,
> Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights . . .
> *Milton.*
>
> One gusty day, now stormy, and now still. *Crabbe.*

Henry, in his bombastic way, went out in the manner of a General, with camp-accoutrements, forage, herald-king-at-arms, sentry-guards, and small siege-train, his own tent being a pavilion of Lyons silk, gold-fringed and passmented : the same as once used by him at his meeting with Francis on the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Going *incognito*, he got known on the road as the Golden Knight, from the glow in the sun's light of his gaudy armour and horse-trappings ; while Francis had acquired the sobriquet of the Black Knight.

When Henry reached Mede Down Francis was still prosecuting his search round Chipping nine miles off ; and about noon that day two of Henry's outriders cantered into camp, bringing news of the exact whereabouts of Francis ; upon which Henry, who was tilting with Charles Brandon with lances tipped with the ball-braces called " rockets ", disconnected himself with Texas-boy buoyancy from his horse, calling : " Come, Charles, see what I say to the goat ! "

He entered his pavilion, and, sitting, held the quill, thinking, his breath venting from his nostrils in roughish puffs whose measured fan was audible to Brandon leaning near, hands on knees—proof of Henry's energy of personality ; and after ten seconds, pressing open the points of the skating pen, flowingly he wrote :

" Celui que l'en appelle le Chevalier d'Ore vueil tantost scavoir ce qui aye esmeu le très parfaict Chevalier que l'en appelle Chevalier Noir à vaguer et naiger ès le bon pais d'Angleterre à ce temps-cy, quel prouffit, louenge, fame, honneur, ou renommé, quelle enqueste, ymaginacion, ou entreprins, quel gaing ou avantaige à achapter, quel mischief ou deffaulte, ou quelle Chaleur ou aultre chose, aye esguillonné et point le dessusdict très parfaict Chevalier Noir à vuyder de son pays pour venir vaguer ès le susdict bon pais d'Angleterre. Sans doubte répondra que son mestier illec a pour but de chercher et avoir en sa disposicion, administracion, et gouvernement une très belle, gente, doulce et debonnaire demoiselle que l'en appelle Laura Ford ; en quel cas ne prendra de desplaisance ne tristesse que le dessusdict Chevalier d'Ore, à cause du roy d'Angleterre et France, et des Provinces de Gascoigne, Guienne, Normandye, Anjou, Galles, et Irlande, fasse l'entreprinse *d'estraindre incontinent* la Chaleur du susdict très parfaict Chevalier Noir ; en quel but passera ce soir avecques ses forces dans les champes entre les villages de Mede Down et Chipping une heure avant soleil reconscé. Vecy doncques que je requiers à Dieu à jointes mains, et que Dieu ne vueille pas qu'il advienne le contraire ! "

[He who is called the " Golden Knight " desires at once to know what could have moved the very perfect Knight who is called the " Black Knight " to wander and sail into the good land of England at this time ; what profit, praise, fame, honour, or renown ; what quest, fantasy, or enterprise ; what gain or advantage to acquire ; what wrong or default, or what Heat, or other thing, could have pricked and spurred the above-said very perfect Black Knight to leave his land to come to wander in the said good land of England ? Without doubt will he reply that his business here is to seek out and have in his power, sway, and government a very beautiful, high-born, sweet, and charming damsel called Laura Ford : in which case he will not take it ill that the said Golden Knight—on behalf of the King

of England and France, and of the provinces of Gascoigne, Guienne, Normandy, Anjou, Wales and Ireland—undertakes to *quench quick* the Heat of the said very perfect Black Knight ; to which end he will pass this evening with his forces in the fields between the villages of Mede Down and Chipping one hour before sunset. And this I require of God with joined hands, and may God not bring the contrary to pass !]

And soon a herald who came mouthing a bugle down Chipping street was handing the dispatch to Francis, who, with three gallants, was lounging under the greenery of a tavern-porch in half-dress, playing primero (cards).

The King broke a seal that was not the seal of Henry ; but with one glance at the handwriting he recognised his good brother of England, and grinned with his little line of ivory ; then called for a pen and scrawled :

" Celui que l'en appelle le Chevalier Noir n'a qu'aulcuns motz à respondre ne proposer aux raisons du très parfaict Chevalier d'Ore, qui est renomé en clergie et science par toute la terre, veue que la plume du Chevalier Noir, la mercy Dieu, soit mesmement son espée. Le Chevalier d'Ore n'a pas mal diviné ne raysonné que je cherche une gracieuse, doulce, belle, bien adressée, et très gente et parfaicte demoiselle que l'en appelle Laura Ford, pour l'avoir dans me disposicion, administracion, et gouvernement, ce que je fais jà sans decepcion ne mal engin contre le Roy d'Angleterre et France, et des Provinces de Gascoigne, Guienne, Normandye, Anjou, Galles et Irlande. Et pour mieux faire *estraindre incontinent* ma Chaleur de la manière que, se la Fortune me donne tant d'heur, je vueil, je passeraie ce soir dans les champs entre les villages de Mede Down et Chipping une heur avant soleil reconscé. Vecy doncque que je requiers à Dieu à jointes mains, et que Dieu ne veuille pas qu'il advienne le contraire ! " [He who is called the Black Knight has but few words to answer or propose to the arguments of the very perfect Golden Knight, who is renowned in learning and science through all the earth,

seeing that the pen of the Black Knight is, thank God, even his sword. The Golden Knight has not ill guessed or judged that I seek a gracious, sweet, lovely, well-nurtured, and very high-born and perfect damsel called Laura Ford, to have her in my power, sway, and government, which thing I do verily without deception or intrigue against the King of England and France, and of the Provinces of Gascoigne, Guienne, Normandy, Anjou, Wales and Ireland. And in order the better to have my Heat *quick quenched* in the manner which, if Fortune so befriend me, I intend, I will pass this evening with my forces between the villages of Mede Down and Chipping one hour before sunset. And this I require of God with joined hands, and may God not bring the contrary to pass !]

Having stamped the missive with a *cachet-de-chiffres*, and tied it with silk thread, Francis deposited it in a sachet of Genoa velvet broidered with seed-pearl ; and, handing it to the herald, he asked : " How many fighting-men with your seigneur ? "

" Something over a hundred, sir ".

" Ah ". He bowed, though he felt a chill at heart, as on that day when he scribbled " All is lost, save honour " : for with him were only six, though the cream and acme of French chivalry.

And that evening in Mede Down Vale two dust-clouds rolled across the lowland to meet—one a long trail of smoke that galloped, one globular, galloping : Henry with his hundred, Francis with his braggart six : glints like fire flitting in the smokes ; and Henry's host was thundering at a gallop down the slope of a long road, Francis galloping up it in gallant callousness of his doom, not seven hundred yards now separating the two cavalcades, when Henry drew breath and rein together.

" Well, but—"

" Sire ? "—from Charles Brandon half halting.

" Blue death, man ! can'st not see ? Why, there are not twenty of them ! "

" Not ten, Sire ".

" Then, why not cry halt? Cry halt there, Nevil! *Morbleu!* we are not Hounslow butchers—"

" Halt! halt! " went the impassioned shout down the host; so that soon one horseman only was in motion—Thomas Howard, galloping toward Francis, fluttering flag of truce.

And as Francis pranced out to him, Howard pronounced loud parley: That the Golden Knight, having one hundred fighters, laid down arms to the higher valour of the Black Knight, who had but a handful: yet, if the Black Knight would graciously spare his prisoners, the Golden would pick out an equal number of champions—six, as it seemed—to polish the Black Knight's armour—*sur le champ* —then and there: and God defend the right!

Francis prattled an answer crammed with knighthood: there where he stood he awaited fight.

But when Henry had already picked out his six, a yeoman galloped up big with the news that on the skirts of Halford Wood the girl had been spied on a palfrey, she at the time being hotly pursued by three martialists on chargers: and at once the flame of Henry's interest swerved from Francis to Laura: *she* first, and afterwards tourney and joust and chivalric traffic. " Tell the Black-face I'll send him rendezvous ", he threw behind his back, as Howard cantered up with Francis's answer: " You six—come—ride it, ride it! "

These went galloping off north-west; and presently Francis, for his part, was galloping off southward—not without purpose, for he was aware that this *volte face* of Henry could be motived only by some superlative urgency: and what urgency was superlative save the search for the girl of girls? so he made a détour round a wood to veil his purpose of pursuit, then turned with loose rein in the self-same direction as Henry.

Now, however, Henry and his six were lost to view; and Francis and his six rode vainly far into the darkness, following vague wayside rumours, until, long after midnight, in

passing at a languid walk through a forest-path, trying to find some place to rest, they spied in a glade a glow of dying fire ; and Francis remarked : " What if those be they ? "

" Then, we fall upon them ", answered the Chevalier d'Arcy.

" Hold my horse—halt ", whispered Francis, slipping to the ground, to go prowling warily among trunks and underwood toward the glade, where, in truth, lay Henry and his six, who had scoured in vain a tract of country round Halford Wood for Laura and her pursuers, and in this other forest, having lost all sense of direction, had been caught weary by midnight : and on the deep-breathing countenance of Henry Francis saw the gleam of the embers glower.

Near, nearer, he stepped and stepped, till the embers shed a sheen on his lean wedge-face ; when one of the picketed horses shrilled a neigh, he halted, held up his finger at it, showing his little grin, going " *Sh-h-h !* " ; then still on with dashing rashness he stepped, bending far forward on tiptoe his strip of body, and if an animal stamped, he stopped to hold up his finger at it and grin with it ; until now he was in the very centre of the seven sleepers in a situation of sevenfold danger : but, being under a debt to Henry for the clemency of that day's meeting, little he recked, since the aim of his existence was to surpass Henry in every particular—in the matter of chivalric largesse above all.

So now with a ticklish skill he snatched Henry's sword out of its scabbard attached to a sword-belt which now lay lax under Henry, then caught up Henry's horse-pistol and battle-axe, and within six minutes was making off, weighted with all the arms of all the seven.

And, had they been the Seven Sleepers of fable, they must have bounded awake at the row which in some seconds summoned them from slumber—a shouting of " Charge ! Charge ! " and a sound of horse-hoofs charging

upon them, whereat Henry and his warriors sprang madly to arms that were not there ; and when the tramp of hoofs had galloped away into stillness, they stood gaping at the ghosts one of the other, all pale and bewildered men, until Brandon remarked : " 'Tis that swart-faced goat, Sire ".

And Henry, with a brooding under-look : " Thou speakest of a King, Charles ".

" Pardon, Sire ".

Then, suddenly flaming, cries Henry : " The black goat ! If I stick him not for this—! "

Nor was he done fretting the next morning, when, some time after his arrival in camp, one of Francis's knights rode up loaded with the stolen arms, who also bore a dispatch in a sachet of jet-and-pearl-work, precious as gold : The Black Knight, having happened to find the accompanying arms in a glade, presented them to the very perfect Golden in token of the Black's admiration. And if the Golden with six would meet the Black with six on the left side of the chasm named Rendeep Fell that evening at sunset, then and there might trial by combat ensue : to which Henry sent answer, confirming the rendezvous, in a chryselephantine casket of Limoges enamel.

But when his party were half-way to the rendezvous it occurred to someone to ask : " *Which*, though, is the left side of the chasm called Rendeep Fell ? "—and to this no one could answer, Francis having forgotten in making the appointment that a chasm is not a river with sides " left " and " right ".

Clouds, moreover, which had lowered all day were now pouring rain dashed by squalls ; premature twilight deepened ; and when Francis arrived at the chasm in the broken country of calcareous formation between Mede Down and Weedon, he, on the chasm's south edge, vaguely saw Henry's group two hundred yards away on the north edge, who shouted : " Wait there, we come ! " whereat Francis, who heard a voice mingling with the rain, but no words, vehemently called : " Good ! we come ! " while

Henry, who heard a voice, but no words, turned away, to set out somewhat eastward into a path between hills ; and Francis, dimly seeing him take that course, cantered eastward also to a meeting at the chasm's end.

But Henry's path presently led him westward, and in twenty minutes he was standing at the south edge where Francis had lately stood, peering at peering Francis on the north edge.

And once more when the last of the morose twilight had died to darkness, they changed places in a bewilderment of purposes, Henry to the north, Francis to the south ; and now Henry swore, while Francis threw back his throat in a laugh.

That very hour, on returning sour to camp, Henry heard news as to the movements of a man whom he concluded to be Calvo ; and with little delay he broke camp to set out south, sending a messenger to Francis at Chipping, appointing that day week for a meeting on the margin of Ross Water, by Lipton.

CHAPTER XXII

BONNER FAILS

Quand on n'a pas ce que l'on aime, on aime ce que l'on a.
Marmontel.

At this time the three flyers, separated, were vainly seeking one another ; so also Fitzgerald, Macdonald and Mark Bonner, parted, sought one another.

As there could be no more street-prophesying for Calvo now, Wolsey's many-handed arm being out to seize him, Bessie, having three crowns, rode to three several hamlets, and at the first inn left a crown, at the second a crown, at the third a crown, trusting and touching close those whom she approached, having a certain fraternity with the world, in each case receiving a promise that, if Laura or Calvo should appear, they should not be destitute.

Now she herself was destitute, but this was not why her face was like the face of a man in the act of hurtling through Space from world to world—a face of staring scare : for her ears had heard that scream in the forest . . .

And on the fifth day she reached the deepest depth of woe : for, on coming from a wood to beg a morsel of rye-bread—since many chestnuts and acorns left her craving still—at an inn-door she heard two men discuss the great news : Henry had come ! the very Dragon : for the identity of the Golden Knight with King Harry was an open secret in Hampshire—his magnificent way, the nature of his quest, suggesting it. Now she conjectured the meaning of that scream in the forest, jumping to the conclusion that it must have been due to Henry, that Laura might *even then* . . .

She begged no rye-bread that night ; but in the gloom of the wood lay on her face by her mare through the night,

chill and still as a thing of ice. But when morning dawned, a thought had been born in her . . . "Oh, I will go to this man, and kneel——!" she breathed, and now tears relieved her.

Then she had this added thought : If she could present herself to the King, suppliant indeed, yet having for trump-card the King's letters which she had pilfered from Fitzgerald ! Great now was her regret that she had returned them to Fitzgerald : but from an inn-chamberlain at Mede Down she had heard that Bonner was, for some reason, with Fitzgerald, seeking her—finding it convenient perhaps to *pretend* to be against her ? and she felt that, if she could get into touch with Bonner, he might some way manage to get the letters from Fitzgerald for her, she little guessing that Mark had the letters actually in his slop-pouch, Fitz having given him them to keep.

How she might communicate with Mark she soon thought out—would win friendship with some chance scribe at inns, and leave letters for Mark : for time-and-tide which were against her would surely not be against her for ever. So at the instant of resolve she was off : and at the first village left rendezvous for Bonner beneath the great chestnut on the green of Mede Down, one hour after sunset three days thence.

Toward evening of the second day her palfrey fell lame near Lipton, so she left him at a farrier's there ; and down a lane to the margin of Ross Water she moved, resigned that her further journeys must now be afoot.

But down there by the water's edge now stood a group of six women on the point of embarking in the transport which bridged Lipton with Halford ; and the chance of avoiding the long détour made Bessie beg at the ferryman's ear, who granted her a passage.

The last ray of sunset, coming through a depression of the hills which all round embowered the cosy lakelet, blotched the breadth of water with winking patches, which were being shot at by whiffs of a wind blowing from the west ; before which whiffs the boat ran with loose lug-sail,

making good way—the scene there full of peace, of a certain pathos of this earth, and of man's strange romantic sojourn on it. The women sat still, three with babies at the breast, waiting that the boat should rip and run, and the trip be done ; Bessie's forehead was propped on her palm astarboard ; and she was so undone, that that forehead was nodding in half-slumber, when all at once an outcry startled her—an outcry from a skiff, rowed by a single oar, that had slid-by near, whose oar's-man, as the two floating things cleared each other, had seen her head—Garrett Oge Fitzgerald.

But the sail-boat was making such way, that by the time Bessie had rubbed her eyes and blinked round, she could arrive at no more accurate knowledge than that a big man standing in a staggering skiff had his arms cast out after her ; and she heard a shouting from him, also thought that she heard her name, for he was crying out : " Bess ! for Christ's sake ! " and " Bess ", and " Bess "—to Bess a cause of fresh terror, doubled when she saw the oars-man drop, and try with wild right-and-left delvings to follow the sail-boat in fruitless effort ; and she flew to bury herself in a wood as soon as her foot touched land at Halford.

The next afternoon she arrived at Lee, two leagues from Halford, famished ; and here a school-dominie wrote a new letter for her to Bonner, which she left at the Blue Bombard there.

This was the day of her rendezvous with Bonner : so, keeping to solitary routes, she set out for Mede Down.

Not two hours afterwards Mark Bonner sauntered into that Blue Bombard at Lee, where, as he opened Bessie's letter, his toes slipped into dancing, with " Bess ! found at last ! Well, my abounding star— ! "

However, a lady who was watching through a half-open parlour door, saw those capers of jollity—the Lady Anne Boleyn, who quite well recognized Bonner by the description given of him by Flying Sidney ; and presently, feeling

a finger tap his back, Bonner started round to behold a low brow in an aureole over dancing eyes, and the beauty-spot on a short lip, and a jauntily tilted cap of white velvet, surrounded with emeralds, stuck with a feather, and the outpush of a kerchiefed bust, she remarking to him : " You are Mark Bonner ".

" The initials ", he murmured with smirk and bow, " standing for Maître-ès-Beaux-arts, my mistress ".

" Ha, ha ! " her laugh trilling like carillons of silvery things—" you are witty, knave ".

" And you—pretty : if only for the rhyme ".

" Oh ? 'Tis so the wind sits ? Sit you here ".

" Woe's me ! I must be away ".

" Ungallant ! when a lady—"

" For a lady I go ! "

" What, for Laura ? "

Bonner started, blushed. " You know me well—"

" Did I not know your name, booby ? All concerning you I know ".

" Yet I know not you ".

" I am called Anne Boleyn ".

" What, the King's—"

" Friend ".

" Why, Madam—"

" Oh, no *madam* : I am only a girl, Mark, and you a pretty boy, by my halidom. Where did you get those roses and rolling locks, princox ? Come, sit and confess : 'tis to Laura that you go ".

He sat. " No, to Bess ".

" But Bess is the sis ; to go to Bess *meaneth* to go to Laura ? "

" I suppose 'tis so. Yet ' tis to meet Bess I go now ".

" Then, go to thy Laura, boy "—she pushed, " *thou*ing ", him now—" but I am a little—jealous, then "—pouting now a baby's mouth, jerking herself averted.

" Oh, *jealous* ! " jibed Bonner, flattered from toe to top.

Anne threw herself anew to face him. " Is she really so—lovely ? "

" Who—Bess ? "

" Dare play the daw with me ! No—Laura ".

" She is even exceeding lovely ".

" Then, wherefore tarry ? Go to her, booby ".

" Faith, I'd liefer stay ".

" Oh, n lies ".

" I woul l ".

" Because, forsooth, I am the prettier girl of the two ? Would'st dare say that ? " fixing now a keen and serious underlook on his face.

And he : " Oh, I say not the prettier of the two : only as pretty. You are diverse in brightness : you, dawn ; she, night with all night's stars ".

" And of the two you prefer ? "

" Why, faith—the dawn ".

Like a carillon rang Anne's bells of cackle, as she sprang up, and with elbows which flapped like wings, with a swaying suggestion of flight—although she was plump—danced away to a window, to stand with her hands behind her, thinking ; until she span round, pits now dimpling her cheeks, to see now on the brow of Bonner the rash of amorousness, he now a straw in her hands.

" So thou stay'st ? "—coming back to sit with him.

" Must ! "

" Silly boy "—her hand on his shoulder—" what can'st expect of me ? "

" One——"

" Malapert ! You forget who I am "—she filliped his ear.

" I remember what you said ".

" What ? "

" That you are a girl——"

" Brought up in the French Court, Mark ? But, then, Laura—thou lov'st her ".

" You now only——"

" Thy tastes in ladies coincides strangely with Royalty's, meseems, Mark ".

" 'Tis true the King does me the honour to pursue my one-time sweetheart ".

" And thou his—in my person ".

" If I could outrival him with the second, as with the first ! "

" So thou hast hope ? In what ? In thy cherry lips ? Think'st thou I am so frail ? "

" In your pity only I hope ! Look into mine eyes—— ! "

" Oh, thine eyes : they are wide and swimming ; but to resist them, friend, it is only necessary not to look that way, *morbleu* ! "

" That pretty French lisp in the *r*'s you have ! Faith, if you chatter, I crush you in a kiss ! "

" Try it, then ! I'll brawl right out ! You love Laura ! "

" Not I ! "

" You do ! "

" I swear—— ! "

" You do ! Why else make you now to her sister ? "

" Not for Laura—am but taking her some King's-letters —I could prove it—have them here in my pouch ".

" King's— ? Writ to who ? "

" To my Lord Wolsey ".

" In truth ? And how came they—— ? "

" 'Tis a long story. You believe now——"

" Wait—not yet. Where is it thou must meet with Bess to-night ? "

" I—should not say, perhaps ".

" What, not to *me* ? Here's the worth of boy's-devotion, I swear to God ! Am I not the friend of the girls, as thou may'st divine from my knowledge of them ? If thou would'st have me believe half the japing thou spakest but now, tell me ".

" 'Twas *true* ! I am all on fire—"

" Tell, then ".

" For a recompense ? "

" I give, Mark, to such as you : I do not sell ".

Is

" 'Tis beneath the chestnut-tree on Mede Down green that I meet her ".

" When ? "

" After sunset ".

Now Anne's lips had a simper that stamped dimples of fun in that plump firmness of her face muscles ; but when Bonner bent whispering " *Now ?* " upon her, up she leapt, and with that uplifted motion of wingedness went rushing round, he with a flushed face chasing—over a chair which she threw in his way—over a stool—in a very fury of pursuit, until, pretending defeat, she fell his prey upon a settee, resigning herself with a sigh, whereupon he confounded his mouth with hers, while she, with one elbow clutched about his head, held him steadily bound to her, as a mother her suckling, her other hand fumbling in his slop-pouch—a satchel with a flap, hanging from a leather at his waist.

Nor was the kiss finished when Fitzgerald, come so far from Ross Water in his hunt for Bessie, stood in the doorway, his consciousness full of the joyous fact of Bonner discovered ; but then, in the next second—a stab of jealousy : for Bonner was Laura's, and Laura Bess's.

" Why, boy . . . ! "—with reproof in his tone.

Whereupon instantly the boy awaked from intoxication to shame . . . and " Oh, God ", he whispered quick to Anne, " tell him not I told thee aught as to Bess—mad in love with her ! " as up he sprang, while Anne, under the scowl of Fitz, slipped out of the room—at once to mount steed for Mede Down, to see Bessie, who, too, at the same instant was hastening toward the great chestnut-tree on Mede Down green, to meet Bonner.

As for Bonner, though guilty and tremulous, he was yet about to tell Fitz of the rendezvous, and to set out, when suddenly he discovered—the letters gone from his slop-pouch ; and now an anguish of cowardly shame so confounded and abashed him, that he escaped from his friend, and spent half the hours of darkness in random and headlong ramblings, bareheaded, about that neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXIII

EIGHTEEN PIECES OF CANNON

> She was a Gordian shape of dazzling hue,
> Vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue,
> Striped like a zebra, freckled like the pard,
> Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson-barred.
>
> *Keats.*

When Bessie, travel-sick, got to the green of Mede Down in the hope of meeting Bonner and getting back the King's-letters, Harry had already broken camp and set out further : and no purple pavilion was there.

Nor did Bonner come : but Anne Boleyn came instead, to station herself at a tavern-casement, whence she presently perceived a meek creature, carrying a bundle, take stand under the chestnut-tree ; but, as she could make out no face, presently, lightly gathering up her murrey-velvet riding-gown, she sallied out ; and, taking no pains to conceal her interest in the poor wayfarer at present seated with a slung knee on a stone under the tree, Anne passed and repassed four or five times, overweening, like a pacing peacock, near the way-worn waiter, so that now Bessie's lids lifted to observe the face of her observer : and " My mother ! " quoth the girl to herself, " how this lady is for regarding me. . . ! " while an instinctive enmity surged within her at a message in her nerves of her worst, her fatal, enemy.

Pretty sure now of tracking Laura, having found Bessie, not suspecting that the sisters were separated, Anne presently went back to her window to watch the solitary figure ; and she was stationed there when, on a cavalcade cantering into the village, she saw the face of her emissary, young Percy, arm in sling, with a fresh following of seven :

so she sent a chamber-maid to call him, while the searchers loosed girth, and picketed their steeds to browse the green round about the great tree-bole ; so that Bessie, seated with a slung knee, a stone on a stone, was now in the midst of steeds.

And presently on busy bow-legs Percy broke all in black armour into Anne's parlour, his curls of blonde silk bursting loose like the cocoon from under his morion ; and at once he had her caught bodily in his one arm, boisterously to buss at her.

And she to him : " As though thou hast earned that right ! Where is the girl I sent thee to find ? "

" That girl ! " he cries, and snaps his fingers : " I have stuck five men, and, 'sdeath, lost nine in seeking her, and yet have her not ".

" Knowest thou, Percy, if my Lord Wolsey hath haply had hand in all this matter ? "

" 'Twere like enough. Methought, that first night at the Eastcheap inn, I met a Wolseyman, and, 'sdeath, I snipped his weasand ".

Anne started !—to this moment having had no knowledge that Wolsey was in the hunt. If *his* hand was against hers——!

" Hast encountered the King's host ? " she suddenly asked.

" Even now passed by it—he camps to-night not five miles hence, on this side Lee ".

" Ah, but Francis would beat him in this seeking, if *I*—— Dost think thou could'st kill Francis for me ? "

" Francis ? 'Sdeath ! Am I not a Percy ? Francis of France, quotha ? 'Sdeath ! I'd spit him like a moor-cock ! "

" Sure ? A Colbrand in war is he, mark you, and in love, too—I hear "—giggling a little.

" Hath made love to thee, hath he ? "

" Perhaps ! Perhaps ! "

" 'Sdeath ! I'd spit him—— "

" Nay, I love thee, booby : Francis thou must not fight,

he'd quench that hot pate in half—But there is another whom I would have thee kill—this hour——"

" Hear her ! Francis of France ? 'Sdeath ! I tell thee there's not arrow a one of them can stand one pigeon-dunging's space before this axe, except——"

" Well ? "

" One knave. Pah ! I spit upon him. But, faith, he fights like ten thousand thunderclaps, Anne. 'Sdeath, he can fight. I love him like my brother ".

" And who is this warrior ? "

" His name, they say, is Fitzgerald—Irish louse. 'Sdeath ! I'll cleave him yet ".

" Fitzgerald ? Why, 'tis *he* I mean ! You have him now —this hour—he is this instant at the inn at Lee—alone "—for since, not two hours since, she had left the inn at Lee under the frown of Fitz's brows, and since Fitzgerald, as Bonner had said, was " mad in love " with Bessie, she feared him, and saw here her chance to smash him.

" But—my left arm is in bandage ", observed Percy.

" You have seven——"

" Seven against one—oh, come ! 'sdeath ! fair-play and roast-ox, Anne ".

" You cavil, then, at my behests, boy ? Hands off, prithee ! This Fitzgerald which I bid thee kill seized me one hour since, and would have kissed my mouth——"

At this the lad's hand clapped upon his axe-handle, his keen teeth hissed a " 'Sdeath ! ", and now Anne, pushing his shoulder : " Go—no, not one buss, till thou be back. And, Percy, leave me here two of thy servitors : I may need them ".

Off he went on a new impulse with his busy bow-legged roll, scattering behind a careless hand-wave ; and out on the green he cried : " Hi, Bennet ! Bridges ! ", approaching, as he spoke, the chestnut, where the men, their work of picketing just ended, were ; and " Quick ", he said, " swallow a repast—fifteen minutes—Fitzgerald is at Lee inn, 'sdeath, three at a time we finish him . . ." : on which

the men hastened after him into the inn ; and there under the tree remained Bessie Ford, a stone on a stone, the notion of Fitz's death having in it for her a desert of lonesomeness, somehow : and slowly her body rocked, rocking with it the knee of woe slung between her fingers.

And only fifteen minutes for the repast—they horsemen, she afoot, ready to drop dead with her sorrows.

But, hopeless now of Bonner's coming, she jumped up : would do what she could—though he caught and slew her —to warn him. She ran, in her gait mingling a limping failure of the left leg ; and Anne, watching from the tavern, spurted down and out, certain now of Laura, to follow furtively along the high-road toward Lee : a high-road which passes through a deer-forest (celebrated for a Henry I anecdote) called Eleanor Wood.

But once Bessie, chancing to glance backward from the bottom of a hollow, caught sight of a gown which vanished ; upon which she quickened her steps ; and when the next hill-brow hid her she flew with all her wind until the path entered Eleanor Wood, where, as she passed into the darkness, she darted askew into a thickness of spinny. Three minutes afterwards Anne realised that the quarry was lost to her.

But Bessie had not long gone on in her détour when her advance began to grow impossible because of the jungle of forest-growths which embarrassed her sense of direction, and at last barred her way ; whereupon she lost some bitter minutes in fumblings, but finally contrived to refind the highway through the forest ; and as she again entered it, Anne, who, with a feeling of defeat, had languidly continued her way, spied her, and slipped behind an elm.

In the next second a screech reached far through the timber—a screech of crazy bliss, as Bessie darted to clasp Laura in her arms.

For Laura, with Calvo, was then passing along the road in the opposite direction, they two having been led together by Sidney Boleyn, who, in general, knew the whereabouts

of everyone in Hampshire, Sidney being even now with them, leading them to Bessie at Mede Down, where he had knowledge that Bessie was. He was leading his horse, Laura leading hers, which was lame, for, as the sage in his wanderings had lost his mule, all were walking afoot.

And " Come, Master ", said Sidney, " I will escort you to a fair domicile for the night, safe enow, though close, I avowch, to the King's camp . . ."

Calvo was grinning ; patted Bess, as she hugged at Laura ; said " Well, well ".

And now they followed Sidney's steps into the forest-depths to an elm, old as the founding of Rome, that had a roomy hollow, and had grown solitary on a grass-mound ; and there, sitting, Bessie tilted the face of the beauty to the moon to muse on it—had forgotten Fitz and his doom ! —to see the lovely face duskily pallid now, heavenly haggard, like Venus sea-sick, like Helen in crapes : for the fair one was frail, did not take well to escapades, and sat languid, sad, Spanish melancholy on that eye-lash of her littler left eye that looked out meditating.

The seer, meantime, a little distance from the tree, was conversing furtively with Sidney, hearing from a cider-house a quarter-mile away a drowsy sound of revelry, virginal and laugh and rebec, with the twinkle of tamboureens : for Kings were hereabouts, and money flowing brisk.

" And these letters left at inns for me ", Calvo was saying : " art sure they are from my Lord Wolsey ? "

" Oh, sure ", answered Sidney : " in each case they have been left by a gallant called Havard, who searches in company with four : and Havard, I know, is a gentleman-almoner of my Lord Cardinal of York ".

" What can the pork have to say to me ? . . . But, as to the Black Knight, now—finish thy story ".

" There is but little to add : pricked by the King's ensample, he hath summoned to him eighty men from his ship ; and these, now on the march, bring four howitzers,

three culverins, five falconets, two sakers, and four mortars, making eighteen pieces of enginry in all ".

" Well, but the chuffs—with what object——? "

But here an outcry startled them—from Bessie, who had now remembered Fitz and his doom, and flew toward the seer and Sidney, crying : " Oh, Master Sidney ! a poor man at Lee inn standeth in peril at the hand of eight fighters who even now hasten thither——"

" What name ? "

" Master Fitzgerald he is called——"

" Why, the fighter——"

Just then a galloping passed on the highroad, and " Oh ! 'tis piteous—holy Mother ! those should be even they ! " went Bessie.

" I shall be there within time ! " called Sidney ; and, tossing behind with a cry a parcel of rye-cake and viand, he was off, in three minutes had Percy's party behind him, and five minutes before them arrived at Lee, to inform Fitzgerald that fifty armed men had sworn to take his life that night : so Percy found the inn without a tenant.

Thus Bessie saved the fighter ; but, as though, in fact, Something was against her, there, behind a bole, lurked Anne, observing her.

CHAPTER XXIV

KING AND MAID

Then forth she rode, clad on with chastity. *Tennyson.*

How are Thy servants blest, O Lord !
How sure is their defence !
Eternal wisdom is their guide,
Their help Omnipotence. *Addison.*

There were thus four individuals together in the wood when Sidney galloped away ; suddenly there were only two : for Anne, seeing the sisters disposing themselves to sleep, stole away to fetch for the seizure of the beauty the two Percy-men left at Mede Down for her ; and Calvo, too, moved away through the wood, making for the hamlet whence the music of revelry came : for there, Sidney had told him, a letter awaited him ; and, going, he muttered : " Whatever can the pork have to say to me ? "

As for Bessie, her brow was now tumbling slumbrously about ; although she was pined, her effort to eat had failed in a sigh ; so pretty soon the sisters lay nude abed within the elm's room, and slept.

In fifteen minutes the seer was anew at the tree from the inn with Wolsey's letter, which said that, if Mauro Calvo, the Magister, would visit the Abbey-ruins in the east region of Eleanor Wood any morning that week at two o'clock, he would meet there an ambassador of the Cardinal.

Calvo went " H'm ! ", armed himself with some odd objects from his bag, lay down, slept placidly till one ; then sat up to glance at his Limoges watch of porcelain by the glimmers of a moon now swooning well westward down a heaven full of cloud, whose gloomy march her glimpses lit up in patches of lunacy ; some spears of rain raided the

trees ; and still from a distance breathed on the ear that merry trembling of tamboureens.

And presently Calvo was pacing away eastwards to the Abbey-ruins, where, exactly at two, there was a rush among the bushes, followed by the coming of Havard—an officer of Wolsey, who, draped in a cloak, stood before the sage, asking : " Mauro Calvo ? "

" The same, sir ".

" I come to you with an offer from my Lord Cardinal. Sheer frankness betwixt us, methinks, were meet in this our conference : and frank I shall be. Promise you no less ? "

" Let me hear ", said Calvo.

" My Lord Wolsey, for his own purposes, desires to have in his custody the person of your ward, Laura Ford, and this month near hath so desired. Now, consider my lord's astonishment that a wench like this should so long thwart his purpose ; and he attributes her escaping to the wit and working of the sage, Mauro Calvo ".

" And would have me betray this poor person into his hand—— ? "

" Not so. But he believes that, without you, she would be his within some hours ; and he would merely have you leave the sisters to their own counsels ".

" And in quittance what offers he ? "

" Safety, quiet, stable habitation to prosecute your studies —all that you most desire ".

For some minutes Calvo answered not a syllable, the temptation was so immense. He had in his mind the bringing-off of a thing ! and for it required but safety, quiet, stable habitation.

So he stood silent, and during that silence Anne Boleyn, stooping behind a broken buttress, clapped her hands inaudibly, with " Too late, my lord Cardinal ! Trumps ! Trumps ! the maid is mine ! "

She had been riding from Mede Down with the two Percy-men to seize Laura, when she had caught sight of Havard's horse tied near the road ; and, having overheard

Flying Sidney tell Calvo of the Wolsey-letters awaiting him, she had divined, from the Cardinal's baretta stamped on the horse's trappings, that there was a meeting between Calvo and a Wolsey-man : so, commanding her men to wait there, she had alighted, and through undergrowth had tracked the signs of Havard's advance to the ruins.

Now, however, noting the silence of the seer, the signs of his yielding, and realizing that there was need for speed, she rose, and stole, and ran back to her palfrey ; and now made with the two men for the elm.

As for Calvo, when at last he spoke, it was to say : " I have the Cardinal's promise that no harm will be done me, nor attempt made to track me hence, whatever my answer. Is't understood ? "

" You have also my own pledge ", said Havard.

" Then, my answer to the Cardinal is this : That I deny not the largeness of his offer ; but that I am a fool, and I refuse ".

" You stick to the maidens ? 'Tis final ? "

" Yes. Say that the great Mauro Calvo—great as King or Cardinal in his way—is doddering to his dotage. He refuses ".

Havard bowed. " There remains this to add : if at any future time you be moved to accept my lord's offer, then you deposit your acceptance at the Thistle Inn at Halford : and my lord Cardinal's known love for the learned, despite your perverseness, will still serve you in good stead ".

Calvo was pleased in his recesses. " Well, now ", he said, Havard gone, " 'tis handsomely done. The pork's not wholly a chuff and thick beast, like those other chuffs. And here is poor forlorn Mauro Calvo tempting the great man's patience, all because of that Bess—well, well "—pacing back to the elm, making a détour to dodge any watcher, catching at one point a noising of far hoofs—hoofs of Anne and her two, making in haste for the elm.

She, when within fifty yards, whispered halt ; and, dismounting, stepped forward alone to see that all was well for the seizure.

It was drizzling, but as the elm's opening looked westward, the moon, now old in 'foreday vigil, lit each detail within the tree's hole, she westering far now in celestial silver with the eye of a dying saint who, after many a strife through glooms, at last, surprised, spies heaven agape, and a moonlight smites his face ; so, as Anne with picked-up skirt and craning neck, on tiptoe, pried within, she saw—and started !—Laura not there : Bessie only there, her limbs tossed in slumber, scarcely covered by the tumbled blanket ; and, near her, a heap of clothes.

A feeling of defeat—the bitter thought of Wolsey—filled Anne. Had Calvo *already* betrayed ? That was hardly possible. Where, then, was Laura Ford ? Now she must be Anne's or never : if not *now*, then she was Wolsey's.

Anne turned to hunt, but instantly turned again to the tree : there was Bessie—and with the double object of searching further without fear of Bessie's interference, and of doing a wanton turn to the poor dreamer, she stalked on tiptoe into the tree, swooped up the poor little garments on her arm, picked and gathered the blanket with dainty fingers, and was gone.

And now through her sleep a spear of apprehension pierced Bessie, who started up with a crazy gaze, with a groping hand : only emptiness—Laura not there.

Her very first thought was of King Henry—the Dragon's camp hard by : she knew whereabouts—from Sidney ; and the next impulse of her stunned soul was toward her clothes : no clothes there ; the blanket vanished ; she a prisoner.

She rushed to the opening : " Master Calvo ! " . . . Calvo not there.

She was a prisoner—*if* ropes could hold her, or the wonts of the social eras. Happily, she knew where Calvo had his bag concealed among leaves, and, running all flurried to it, she took out the knife—for King Harry's heart, for Laura Ford's—she knew not which : for a question—a suspicion —had shaped itself in her brain : *why* had not Laura, on being seized, called out ?

There stood Laura's palfrey, cropping : and when with fluttering hands she had strapped him, unfastened his halter, and mounted, she moved south-westward through rain, which, though not heavy, was steady. And soon it was trickling from the extremity of her little " natte ", or plait—long as a hand—her immaculate body, as she moved amid the foliage under the glimpses of the moon, looking bluish, ghostly ; the nag reluctant, being lame, limping deeply ; and when with vehement impotence she beat it with the short halter-end, he hardly smartened a little his walk, then lapsed back into his limp.

" Oh, go, horse ", quoth she.

Among the tree-trunks she wound, always south-westward, toward the King's camp—clad in a string of rowan-berries—knife in hand—stubbornly on, into the mouth of hell, Henry having now acquired in her imagination the breadth and height and red breath of Satan himself : till she came to the end of the forest, where she saw that day was breaking ; but saw no camp ; and for some time rode at random in open country, with wild haste, with little speed, impotently beating the horse's neck with the halter-end, like some wight who fights in nightmare, and his forceless efforts fail and faint.

She had no tear to weep, her face was grey, having a rigour as of death, for she suffered despair, not doubting that the King actually now had her love ; and now she wet her lip with her tongue's tip, and now looked about with feeble and woeful eyes, breathing " By my credit, it is morning ".

But soon, catching the fluting of a bugle galloping on the air, mechanically she moved that way, to find the King's camp lying quite close, behind the shoulder of a hill, the King's pavilion at the top of a street of tents, blocking the street into a *cul-de-sac*, the camp lying on an incline studded with rock-boulders, dotted with pines, the pavilion a little higher than the other tents ; and within three minutes the little mare was limping up the street of tents.

Now, at that sound of trumpet the whole little host was roused and up ; and Henry, ever a stirrer before the bird, was lolling at his door, conversing with Brandon, as with limp and limp she rode through a double row of eyes that stared in a silence of amaze more than a minute : but at the end of that time there was sound, when, that lame pastern of the palfrey happening to strike a boulder, down upon both knees he steeply dived, Bessie with a little " Oh ! " of shock making a catch at his mane ; and at that stumble, and her little humble " *Oh !* ", up both rows of doors, from bottom to top, arose a roar of merriment—not yet from Henry : for, she riding west, Henry was prying east, the sheen of the dawn in his eyes, which he was shading with his palm beneath peering brows, to see ; and when, twenty feet from him, a yeoman caught Bessie's bridle to hold her he called : " Let be . . . ! Let be . . . ! ", having not yet seen well, nor realized ; but, as she limped three steps nearer, back went his merry head, with " Ha ! ha ! ha ! Why, mamie . . ."

Now she is on her feet, near him, shivering like the sheeted dead, her knife ready. . .

" Give her to me ! "

" Oh, come, mamie, this is a bit red "—making a ribald pretence of hiding away his eyes from the sight of her : " By heaven, 'tis red, Charles ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! "

Charles Brandon was in two with merriment, hands on knees.

" Give her back to me ! "

" If the Queen were *here* ", cried Brandon, squeaking out " *here* " in a crisis of laughter.

" Mamie, mamie "—from Henry—" there is the Queen, with her Spanish jealousy——"

" Will you give her to me ? My mother, believe me, I'll *kill* you——"

Now as she raised the blade, the situation terribly changed : Henry held up palms of alarm ; Charles Brandon, aghast, grasped the raised arm.

" My sister is——"

" How dare you ? "—from Brandon.

" Hold, hold, she speaks of a sister "—from Henry.

" Which sister ? " queried Brandon quick.

" You have her there in the tent——"

Henry and Charles exchanged wondering glances.

" No, mamie, we've got no sis ", said Henry with gentle sincerity.

" What sister speak'st thou of ? " queried Charles Brandon again.

" The sister you've come out to chase : I say give her to me——"

Now Henry, glancing quick at her face, recognised it—had glanced once before at it in Calvo's dim den, under London Bridge. . .

" 'Tis Laura's sister ", he whispered at Brandon's ear ; and aloud : " Why, my poor dear, we have her not ".

And now at that ruth, " *My poor dear* ", down drooped Bess to her knees before Henry's feet, tears pouring over her face.

" God's pity ! " he whispered, " it weeps "—snatching his huge cloak from a stool, stooping with a look of compassion to throw it over her and secure it at her throat : which new clemency proving all too much for the poor Bess, now her heart broke, and in a burst of sobs she spoke bubbling words of lost meaning, while he, stooping low over her, muttered : " God's pity, it weeps ! Tut, tut ! 'tis an honest good soul ! "

" Don't do it ", at last her sounds fought to some audibleness out of the rush of the storm of her chokings—" you declare me that she is not here, and, by my credit, I am believing you : but don't hunt after her narrow more. It is hard on a poor sister's heart—I don't think the saints in Heaven, nor the good God—don't you ! Methinks there is somewhat which judges even a King—and sees the tear of the helpless—hears their appeal—in the day—of their dreadful—distress. Don't you ! Hear your poor subject. . ."

In that instant the will of the King yielded to her will, his one hand on her spasming head, his other dashing a something from his eyes, while, with his face stooped low to her face, he pleaded : " Why, weep not, good Bess—stanch it, stanch it—am I not thy good Father and King——? " But now he paused, hearing a sound fluting from afar, a bugle's sound calling in the air ; and when in that same second Brandon happened to utter this word " Francis—" Henry fretfully shook his face, crying out : " Have the wench out of my sight ! Faith, man, she makes a fool of me "—phrases which, begun in a roar, ended in a shamed grumble, as he beat a retreat into the pavilion.

And when Brandon followed within to whisper : " Perchance, the girl, if tracked, might furnish us trace of her sister ", Henry grumbled at him : " Oh, don't be a hound, let her have fair-play—toss her on a sound nag, and send her packing ", then sat grumpy, head on hand, hearing Sinai rumbling in his bosom and a fearful voice " nearer than breathing "; while Bessie was cantering down the camp wrapped in the King's riding-cloak.

So the King had not Laura ! Where, then, was Laura ? Wherever she might be, Bess was no longer in anguish : for it was Henry, the Dragon, whose bedraggling fangs, whose breath of death, she dreaded.

And all this time Laura sat at the opening of the elm, wondering after Bessie : for, having awoke in the night refreshed, and having heard an eternal tremble of tamboureens, virginal and far laugh, her palms had met in a single clap, her giddy nature leaping always to the call of dance and gaiety : so she had peeped out, seen that Calvo was not there, whisked-on her things, gone to watch the jolly tavern-yard. When she got back Bessie was gone.

And not till it was broad daylight did Bessie canter back to the elm for fresh ferreting in the forest for Laura ; and, spying Laura, and with Laura Calvo, she uttered a cry, sprang, ran, trailing far the King's cloak, and, half fainting, fell upon her sister.

CHAPTER XXV

WOLSEY'S RAGE

Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchise, be feared, and kill with looks.

Shakespear.

It had been Calvo's cynical plan, as we hinted, to draw upon him his pursuers to their mutual destruction, while he escaped to the coast : and, although when on the point of putting it into execution he had been frustrated by his accidental separation from the girls, in the hour that he found himself reunited with them his mind recurred to it ; so that at that very moment when Bessie in the King's cloak arrived at the elm, the scientist was looking out for Flying Sidney with this in view ; and soon the pale-faced rider appeared, slipped off his steed, stood near Calvo, cap in hand.

" I am going to confide to you a thing of high importance ", the scientist told him. " Being serious in my will to baulk these cattle that weary me, my scheme is to lead them all after my tracks, and at the last to have them gathered round about some house, where I can actually at a casement exhibit the girl's face, to the intent that they shall rage within, working havoc upon one another in narrow space, while I, by some hidden exit, make good my escape. There should be some such house in Hampshire ? "

And Sidney, after some reflection, answered : " There is the tavern at Baneleigh ".

" Tell me of it ".

" It lies about nine stone-throws from Broughton Castle —hardly two miles from my father's Hampshire house : so I know the landlord well, and, for me, if you mention my name, he will favour you ".

" But the exit—— ? "

" The tavern is part of the old Saxon Abbey at Baneleigh—was the Abbot's quarters—and from its cellars run to the abbey-ruins an underground passage, by which, as they tell, the Abbots were wont to surprise the merry monks in refectory ; and in this passage, oft and oft when a boy, I have spent dark days badgered with pain ".

" The tavern stands by itself ? "

" Yes, at about the centre of Broughton Vale—an old house made of grey stone, with stone-shafted oriels of Purbeck, its front looking west upon the flat land round Broughton Castle, at its side to the north the ruins, covered in forest, a hundred yards off ; and all betwixt ruins and castle, and at the castle-back, is store of forest : so your flight will be well hid ".

" Any villages ? "

" Only one within a mile of the tavern ; but all about the hills encircling the valley you have little hamlets ".

" What names ? "

" Fletcherfield, Stroud, Cleve, East Hythe, Winton, Little Baneleigh, Sudbury Rye ".

Calvo muttered the names, storing them in the storehouse of his bulging round brow ; and " Very good ", he said, " I dare say it will answer. Wilt accompany me, thou ? "

" Alas ! I cannot now ".

" How so ? "

" My half-sister Anne at Lee inn requisitions me to carry her a despatch to London—'twas with difficulty I escaped her but now to come to you ".

" Thou canst not say her nay ? "

Sidney drew in his breath with a siffle, signifying " No " ; whereat Calvo waved him languidly off ; and he—with an obeisance to the sage, and with a wave toward where Laura with volubility and gestures was giving to Bess the history of her week's adventures—got upon his horse, to be off to Anne at Lee.

Now, her discovery that Wolsey, too, was hunting the

beauty had thrown Anne Boleyn into a state of scare and upset her nerve, since she knew that he could have no purpose in view but her ruin, that since her game was to give the beauty into the King's hands, Wolsey's must be to keep her out of the King's hands, having her meantime in his own. As to the other seekers, she felt that she could pit her wits against them, and win ; but Wolsey was different ; now the great tempter was at Calvo's ear ; and she despaired—almost. However—a last card : she having the King's letter to Wolsey picked out of the slop-pouch of Bonner, the word " Divorce " in it, Anne's own name : so that a hint of its contents to Charles of Spain would precipitate upon the head of Wolsey a bucketful of trouble with Charles, with the Pope. So she wrote now a letter, throwing off reserve, avowing open enmity in a very flurry and intensity of feminine terror :—Only on condition that Wolsey would sink out of the pursuit of the girl Ford, would she, Anne, persecuted virgin that she was, refrain from playing the game which the possession of Henry's letter gave her to play. This, on six pages of close-written French, she poured out.

With this letter Sidney started about noon ; near Odiham changed horse ; at Chertsey supped ; near Staines stopped late at a mareschal's for a shoe; and far into the hours of darkness he rode, crouching like a ghostly monkey over the stretched neck of his horse. Before dawn he got to London. Wolsey was at Hampton.

Off he went again ; and at about half-past eight was bowing on the lawn before the great priest-man, who in cardinal-red was taking the air with quick-planted steps, a little manual held open betwixt thumb and finger ; and behind him an old untidy gospeller with tacking journeys shambled in black buckram, burdened with big books in pig-skin.

Throwing down an eye from the height of his bridled throat, Wolsey observed the writing, put out his hand, his superb coarse lips smiling their eternal smile of insolence ;

and, as he read, he stepped, carrying his mass of majesty exactly in the manner of some proud old dowager.

As he read, he smiled, and, having read, he smiled ; turned upon Sidney : " Art tired, poor lad ? Get thee through the archway there into the court, and bid a henchman let the carver lard thy belly, and stable thy beast ".

He waited quite still until Sidney was away : and now, thrice, his bright brown eyes flitted a little from side to side in flying deliberation.

Then he himself, almost at a run, went toward the house : and now his brown brow was of a redder brown of rage.

Now, he was a worker—worked like a whirlwind ! this, in fact, being his character : that he worked like a whirlwind, cramming with the rage of Hercules five labourers' five-days'-work into a single night's vigil ; so that before Sidney was half through his repast he had set off with ten trusty men for Hampshire, he himself in a tylsent frock of Dominic black, a black mask over his brow and nose : and like some frowning thunder-cloud he went, with spinning speed, breathing to himself : " This night she must be in my hands. . . "

Few could have lashed him to action so furious : but for Anne Boleyn, who was, in truth, his evil destiny, his nature cherished a deep hatred ; and her letter of threat had lit into a rage of flame his mine of supercilious pride. With spinning speed he went.

Having been kept posted as to events in Hampshire, he knew the movements of Francis, of Harry, knew already of Havard's rendezvous with Calvo in the wood, and its result, and had been content to direct from Hampton the capture of the Helen ; but when Anne's letter brought him the first knowledge which he had that she also was a searcher, he, immediately piercing her reason, and revering her wits as she his, perceived that her presence on the spot necessitated his also : so expedience urged him to be journeying, but chiefly shrieking and flagrant arrogance urged him.

The risk, however, of this expedition was boundless ! for, if Henry should get scent that his Cardinal's motive was to thwart and baulk him !—then would there be a stamping of the foot. So Wolsey put on a black frock and mask.

He galloped into Mede Down at vespers, and there got news of Calvo ; he galloped on to Lee, and there got news of Calvo ; he galloped on to Halford, and there again got news of Calvo ; and now brooded his brow profoundly, in this very regularity of news his acumen detecting a mystery which he did not as yet see through.

At Mede Down, the previous day, three forest-keepers gay in Lincoln green, with buck-hounds in leash and jessed falcons on wrist, had been jogging to the manor-house near, when a man in a skull-cap had cantered up, had demanded his way to Fletcherfield, had cantered away in haste : and this Wolsey heard at Mede Down.

From Mede Down the seer had proceeded to Lee, where, near curfew-toll, some local fête was whirling round a May-pole, and there had craved to know his way to Sudbury Rye, volunteering the information that to Sudbury Rye with a brace of maidens he was making ; and while the yokels yet meditated upon his face and skull-cap, had cantered off : and this Wolsey heard at Lee.

At Halford the next matins Calvo had demanded of an inn-wife the way to Little Baneleigh : and while the wife yet meditated upon his face and skull-cap, he, apparently taking fright, had cantered off : and this Wolsey, that same night, heard at Halford.

That the sage had designedly divulged these diverse destinations Wolsey's wit instantly divined : also that all were false : nor was it until he had ridden on to Lipton, west of Ross Water, that a possible truth in all of them took root in his conceptions. At Lipton the sage had left the rumour that his destination was Stroud : and at Lipton Wolsey perambulated the inn-buttery with agitated steps, rustling a *frou-frou* of his frock, masked, hands on chest. A priest of fierce countenance was he that evening.

" And where is Stroud ? " he asked the landlord.

" 'Tis atop of Broughton Vale, your worship ".

" Broughton Vale—where the castle of Sir James Broughton is ? "

" The same ".

" Stay : Fletcherfield—knowest thou where it lies ? "

" 'Tis a village in Broughton Vale, too ".

" And where is Little Baneleigh ? "

" Why, even atop of Broughton Vale ".

" And where is Sudbury Rye ? "

" Why, so God me save, even in that very Vale, at the top, your worship's honour ".

The Cardinal paused in his walk. " Has any person made search here to-day after this man ? "

" There was a lady, your worship, at the hour of sext ; and then a party of three about the hour of none——"

Wolsey hurried to the door ; and without one minute's delay was away with his ten from the village.

He now remembered with complacency that Sir James Broughton was under his thumb, his man, bound to him : the castle, therefore, would afford a place of sojourn for him and his captives for the night, without the slightest chance of the King having wind of the capture : for of a capture Wolsey was now sure, understanding that Calvo was voluntarily surrounding himself with his pursuers, that his motive could only be their mutual destruction, to effect which, Calvo must himself be in their centre, must have, too, some way of escape ; and in Wolsey's head was already a divination that somewhere about the centre of Broughton Vale must be some subterranean way.

Not once did he draw rein until he was clashing the belfry-bell at the outer drawbridge of Broughton Castle, aware that there was need for haste ! for had not a lady been investigating things at Lipton " about the hour of sext " ?—a lady, he guessed, with a wit quick at seeing ! and, in fact, Anne Boleyn having been hearing at the hamlets through that day the selfsame news which Wolsey had

been hearing, her astute brain had reasoned in his very way, to reach his very conclusions—and with swifter decision, she having old familiar acquaintance with the subterranean way betwixt tavern and abbey-ruins.

As to whether such a way was in existence in the district was Wolsey's first question at the castle ; and, even as he asked it, the seer, with the sisters, were feasting on calvered salmon and perch-in-foyle in the tavern-buttery, where they had been welcomed by the landlord on Calvo's mention of his friend, Sidney Boleyn. It was past midnight now, an hour when, yonder in the monastery-ruins, spirits of old-time monks were flitting from dorter to choir at the ringing of the carillon for " prime ", and Calvo with a crammed mouth was impressing upon a hostler at his side the order in which he should forthwith ride to all the different villages, pretending that the landlord had sent him, with the news that the fugitives were at the tavern.

For he knew that, induced by his hints dropped at villages, Francis with eighty now lay in tents upon Sudbury Rye ; that Henry camped at Little Baneleigh : that Alvarada and Sir John Perrott occupied Stroud ; while Fitzgerald and Bonner, united now with Macdonald by the pursuit of a common trail, were at Fletcherfield ; Northumbrian Percy, and also some Wolsey-men, at Winton ; Du Ballay and his knights at East Hythe—a circle of arms and armour round about Broughton Castle and Baneleigh Tavern.

And Calvo, with absolute cynicism, was now about to send out his messenger to bring them all upon the tavern, when carmine faded from Bessie Ford's cheek-bones, and the sage's heart bumped once, as there broke out a battery at the tavern's door.

For seven from Ormond Hall were there, among them their Lady Anne, who was forcing the situation, bent upon driving Calvo through the subterranean passage before the moment of his plan should be ripe, while in the abbey-ruins, at the other end of the passage, were ambushed four

more of her men : and instantly at the bruit of that battery Calvo knew that in his lute was a rift ; and his heart bumped once.

But before the inn-door dropped in, the host popped his forehead out of window, offering to open : whereupon Anne, leaving instructions with her seven to rush in and ransack each nook, took to her brodequined heels and went full speed up a wet holly-lane, splashing her surcoat of green velvet engrained, to watch the capture in the abbey.

But she had hardly started off when now a party of fifteen marches up from Broughton Castle, amid them the Cardinal and his ten : and, seeing Anne's seven just crushing into the inn-door, Wolsey cried halt, divining in a trice that the lady who had called at Lipton " about the hour of sext " was saving him trouble.

" Let her pluck the apples, and I shall munch 'em ", he muttered ; adding : " Be ready now to fall upon some caitiffs in the ruins, men : forward with you ".

And forward up the holly-lane they marched brisk toward a wilderness of thorn-bush ; then onward to a vista of greensward between gnarled old oaks and huge roots of beech ; then to a fragment of wall, part of the old Cellarer's Buildings ; then three low steps ; whence they picked their echoing way up a nave of pillars in a state of ruin, roofless to the moon ; and, as they moved round a corner where a cloister once stood, but now only a jumble of bush and stones, Anne, standing by a carrel-wall close to the old refectory, saw them. She ran to hide behind the carrel ; and, as the Cardinal passed, walking sharp, she, with an awful start, with a heart of ice, divined him behind his mask.

He had beaten her, he with his fifteen, she with her only four . . . and in a fever-heat of rancour she heaved her hands on high, grating them against the carrel, going " Oh, I must kill that man, or die ! Oh, I must, or die ! "

At the same time she was aware of four sword-clashes—her four, who, surprised by the fifteen, had struck once,

and run ; whereupon Wolsey entered, on the cellar-level, a space between two walls, where some steps went down to a paved gallery upheld on great pillars : within which space the fifteen crouched, with outlook ; while Wolsey stood in ambush among bramble-bush.

Nor had they lain in wait more than three minutes when running feet sent up echoes from below ; and Calvo, hunted from behind by Anne's seven at the tavern, was coming—was come—Bessie holding Laura by the hand : and suddenly all were prisoners.

The scientist brooded awhile upon Wolsey's bulk through his tumble-down eyes ; muttered " The pork ! " ; and Wolsey awhile, from the height of his bridled neck, looked smiling upon Calvo. He said, " Now, Master Alchymist, you see . . . ", while Bessie and Laura clung one to the other ; till the procession started, and they were rent apart.

But on the tramp through the forest, that still stands betwixt the castle and the abbey-ruins, Anne was tracking them ; and no sooner was she sure that the castle was their bourne, than sudden new hope jumped into bloom within her. . . . The King was close . . . !

At once she span about, and rompishly as a tom-boy ran, bound for the tavern, whence her seven were even then streaming out ; past whom she rushed, shrieking " Mine host ! " and, on his appearance, her pant was " Ink ! Ink ! "

At that instant she spied Flying Sidney, who, just arrived from London, had hied hither, to see how the scientist did : and " Sidney ! " she cried, enticed from writing at the sight of him, " hither ! The King's camp is at Little Baneleigh : go thither—flying, thou hearest ?—find Charles Brandon—tell him Laura Ford is now—this moment—in Broughton Castle—taken there by Wolsey ! Stay not gaping —get gone—fly ! "

On which Flying Sidney, who cherished no little apprehension of his sister, was impelled to obey, and flying he went ; but by this time he had divined that Anne, for some

reason, was hostile to Calvo ; and he reasoned that, if the news communicated to Henry were communicated also to the other parties, then would the harm he was bound to do to the Master be countered.

He had, therefore, no sooner whispered the news to Brandon than he was off to Stroud, where lay Alvarada ; and thence to Sudbury Rye, to the camp of Francis ; and thence to Fletcherfield, where were Fitz, Mac, and Bonner ; and to Winton, where was Percy ; and to East Hythe, where was Du Ballay. And when his hard ride was accomplished, and his reeking horse toppled to drop, he saw a streak of morning in the East.

And when, an hour later, the day broke, it saw all the ground before Broughton Castle dotted grey with leaguering tents, and steeds, and guns, and groups of glorious armour—for all had come.

CHAPTER XXVI

BEFORE THE CASTLE

Hark ! hark ! the trumpet swells,
A deep soul-thrilling strain ! *Sigourney.*

The castle was Old-Norman, defended by two curtains which were bastioned at intervals by those semi-circular bastions named " roundels ", before each curtain being a fosse and drawbridge, and before the outer drawbridge an outwork barbican ; the donjon-keep square, of smooth stone, looking east ; and now well to its south stood the purple pavilion of Henry, encircled with a crowd of tents ; while to the north, a mile may-be away, close on the forest-edge, a still more gaudy erection of cloth-of-gold of baudekin, raised with flowers-de-luce of bullion-gold, marked the centre of Francis' camp, an ensign stuck large on its summit, shaking from out its shimmering silk lazy whisperings of War.

Henry and Francis had met—this time undoubtedly to try a bout together.

Two of the investing groups, young Northumberland's and the Wolsey-men, the castle-front being guarded by the other groups, took their station at the castle-back, to cut off the fugitives' escape that way : for the Wolsey-men, through Flying Sidney's crafty silence, had no suspicion that their master was in Hampshire.

This was the disposition of things when, at about seven in the morning, Sir James Broughton, a bald-headed burly person of forty, burst into the chamber in which Wolsey slept, to blurt out : " My Lord Cardinal ! the castle, north, south, east, and west, is invested with armed men ! "

Wolsey's jump shook the low bedstead, as there leapt from his lips the terrified whisper : " Is the King among them ? "

" Among them, yea, my Lord ! Hark ! a bevy of six heralds with pursuivants e'en now draw near the outer drawbridge, blaring fanfares : oh, my lord ! they come from the King with his demands ! "

" Well, let them come ". Already Wolsey smiled, though with a still agitated underlip.

" But, my lord—— ! "

" You will not yield ".

" Oh, but my neck, my neck, my good Lord Cardinal ! "

" All about your neck is the arm of *my* protection, Broughton. The King will proffer his demands in the name of the Golden Knight, I think—yes, I think : and you know not the Golden Knight, Sir James, nor whence he is. You will refuse. How many men with you ? "

" Some sixty in the castle ".

" Enough. Myself will captain them. Leave me ".

Horn-blasts were now blaring at the outer gate, the horns all hanging gay bandrols, and a grating of chains rushing proclaimed the raising of the portcullis ; whereupon the heralds, one of them bearing an ensign emblazoned with argent, a cross, and gules—the arms of St. George—passed the front escarpment—across the drawbridge—under the dark portcullis-arch, where, to parley, came the castle-seneschal, backed by half-a-dozen pikes and carbines ; and " Embassy, embassy, my masters ", said he.

Whereat Herald-king-at-arms cocked forth one cordovan buskin, holding up a parchment, and read : " The puissant knight who hath acquired throughout Christendom the style and cognisance of ' the Golden ' demandeth forthwith the giving up of the three fugitives which, pending and during the night, have within this stronghold taken refuge from the lawful quest of the said Golden Knight ".

Not a word concerning Wolsey : for, although Sidney had delivered Anne's message that it was *Wolsey* who had captured the fugitives, to Henry this was incredible ; and he had said : " This, faith, cannot be . . . "

But great was his amaze when his heralds came again to

him gainsayed by the seneschal, who had " contemned the misproud pretension of the said knight to the person of any person within the precincts of Broughton " ; and now the King frowned, wondering at Broughton's motive, with a notion of the Cardinal rising a moment in the dark of his mind : and " Ha ! " he cried.

But now a blare coming from northward yonder across the plain—half-a-dozen heralds of Francis in doublet and hose of gold-cloth, in blue-velvet cloaks pounced with fleurs-de-lys and Venice twists ; whereat Henry went down a street of tents, to gaze, though already it was not easy to see : for the plain was filling—women with butter and poultry, forage-carts, donkeys under paniers, mules with water-butts, " sturdy beggars ", loiterers, samples of all Hampshire, esquires, publicans, butchers, and yonder a troop of eight " martialists ", retainers of a neighbouring hall, who, having scented the battle from afar, came to proffer their prowess to the castle—or to the camps—little it mattered : so that now, as by miracle, the still country was amove, as when one looks through a microscope at what to the eye was still, and, lo, it is all acrawl, and swarms into movement. And yonder on the battlements also were signs of stir, burdened martialists casting their burdens into piles nigh the bartisans, runnings to and fro, a group putting a springal into position for the seige foreseen, and dream-voices arising, dying, calling orders in the morning sky.

Henry stood looking on, gnawing his mouth's pout, measuring with a certain nervous contraction about the cheek-bones, as though he smacked acid, the fallings-out born here and now before him for his handling.

" Well, you see, the Black-faced's heralds go back with their tails between their legs ", said he.

" Francis will storm the castle, Sire ", said Charles Brandon —" unless you order its surrender in your title as King ".

" Thou talk'st like a—Ha ! and have that goat prating that I made use of my chance of kingship to outdo him in a strange land? Here are no kings, Charles, but only knights ",

" And when we have done all the hard work of storming, Francis slips in, and is off with the girl ".

" He ? off with that girl ? Oh so ? I tell thee, Charles Brandon, within fifty days from the day he lays hands on her I land seventy thousand men on Calais sands ".

" Amen, Sire, I say. But, meseems, some arrangements must be come to——"

" Hold—who the pestilence are those ? "

" Those seem like one of the searching-parties ".

Henry flew into a passion. " Who the pestilence, man, are these rats I hear of ? With what motive, and by what right, search they where I search ? By Heaven, this is something new to me ! Searching parties, quotha ? *Who* are they ? *what* are they ? "

Brandon shrugged. " Faith, I know not, Sire. There is the fellow called Fitzgerald ; and also I have heard it whispered that my Lord Wolsey——"

" My lord *who* ? You babble, man ! I tell you, he wouldn't *dare* . . . Ha ! and this Fitzgerald : what of him ? "

" He is one of the searchers, Sire ".

" But he should be searching for *me*, the tyke ! If not for me, then, for who ? Yet someone said he had been seen to fight for Francis ! "

" If that be he yonder, as is like from his stature, then, he must be a searcher on his own count : for, faith, the effronted knave seems about to summon the castle ".

It was true that up the slope to the drawbridge Fitzgerald did at that moment saunter, by him stepping the natty Mac, and before him Bonner, blowing with both cheeks and scarlet lips a horn, borrowed but now from one of the breed of butcher-boys, who then went their rounds ahorse, with horns ; and " Boy ", quoth Fitzgerald, as he went sauntering largely with his laggard swagger, " sure, thou blowest a herald's clarion like a flute. Give wind ! "

And Mac : " Well, if this is not a hardy thing we do ! "—throwing up his head with a laugh.

" We be hardy fellows, Mac ".

" But—I see no chance here ", said Mac : " here are many, we are two ".

" Two and a herald, Mac—give wind, boysie !—two who have sworn. And, maugre all, why not a chance ? The King and the French champion will sure storm, and, at the entrée, *we* rush in and snatch the prize "—stepping now across the springy drawbridge ; and now under the gate.

Bonner gabbled off his demand for the maidens, to which the seneschal, after finishing his laugh, answered : " Nay, my masters, better drop the jape ye play, and come aid us defend the castle against the rest ".

Whereupon the three span, and paced back to their station betwixt the Kings' camps.

This notion of demanding the maidens under menace of storm had been born in the head of Fitz in a moment of levity ; but no sooner was the whim in process of execution, than the Condé Alvarada, who had taken his station two stone-throws from Fitzgerald, found it knightly : so that Fitzgerald was hardly back when another party of four—Alvarada, Sir John Perrott, and two Queen's-men, one blowing a horn—were on their way to the drawbridge.

Whereupon the contagion of bombast spread and raged ; Du Ballay following with four, to demand surrender in a feigned name : for he had long before discovered the identity of the Black Knight, his master ; but, inasmuch as his master's purpose in the search was personal, and *his* political, and antagonistic, he had taken care to maintain his incognito.

At all which blowing and flourishing Henry stood looking with a sort of fretful wonder. It was high noon when the five Wolsey-men came from the castle-back, blaring a fanfare ; and last of all, with eight Northumbrians pacing, came the young Percy with his busy bow-legged roll, bearing the great flag of Alnwick through the lane of gapers ; after which the lane melted away in the general swarm of loiterers.

CHAPTER XXVII

HENRY AND FRANCIS

Then those two Kings anigh they drew
Withouten Berwick Town ;
There were steeds that flew, and trumps that blew,
And pacings up and down. "*The Joust.*"

But it was a day of embassies. Within two minutes yet a lane of gapers was gaping betwixt the camps of Francis and Henry, up which lane paced in passmented velvet buskins, and cloaks buttoned with aiglets of diamonds, six French heralds, escorted by six knights with bandroled lances on chargers housed in gold and ermine ; and on, blowing a blare, on their banner a cognizance of fleurs-de-lys, they paced toward the purple pavilion—pregnant with this proposal from Francis : why should not the Black Knight and the Golden unite to act together in the attack upon the fortress up to the moment of its impending fall, thereupon to cease treaty, and thenceforth fight each for himself in the seizing of the final prize ?

Henry packed back the heralds, promising answer : and in half-an-hour his own six, with pursuivants, accompanied by yeomen with gilt pole-axes, paced blaring through the lane of gapers to the blazing pavilion of Francis.

Henry assented ; but added a condition : Up to the instant of impending capture, concert ; but then, single combat betwixt the two knights to decide right to the possession of the fugitives ; then anew concert in capturing the stronghold.

Francis sent back the heralds, promising answer : and in half-an-hour his six re-presented themselves blaring, pacing for the camp of Henry.

Francis assented ; but directed the attention of the Golden

Knight to the fact that the Black and Golden Knights were not the only knights, having the same designs, then on the field ; and, although the forces of those others were not imposing, yet knightly courtesy was not quite a dead thing in Christendom—a slap that stamped the skin of Henry with crimson ; he suggested in addition : Concert between all the warriors to the instant of impending fall, then single combat between the two leaders who had first that morning reached the field ; then combat between the conqueror and the leader who had third reached the field ; and so on, till each leader had combated ; and the final conqueror should have right to the prize of the fugitives ; then anew concert of all in capturing the stronghold.

Gravely to and fro paced the brave processions over the plain, blaring ever, filling the day with bluster, until the afternoon sun sloped far westward, sultry, the plain sweltering, crowded now, the ensign of Francis drooping without a movement ; and yonder over the donjon-battlements drooped, too, the Broughton standard—red, blazoned with the house's hatchment, martletts and a patonee—while a smoke from Henry's camp rose scampering like lambs straight up, unrolling itself on high like a pine, motionless. The noise of the morning had dulled to a universal hum and murmur, but for a bleating and lowing in the two camps, heard during each lull of the trumpets' flourishing ; and ten thousand mouths gaped vaguely at the loud heralds faring : for Henry had refused to recognise the other groups ; Francis was inflexible—his *motif* being partly his native amiability, partly a pretension to a finer nicety of knighthood than Henry's ; Henry's *motif* a disdain to enter into competition with his own subjects, caitiffs for whom, when he came to know them, he meant the gallows : and so there arose and wrangled an angry deadlock.

It was only toward sunset that Henry, at the pressing prayers of his gentlemen, gave way : for Francis then sent the threat to conclude the proposed pact with all the groups of knights, excluding only that of the Golden Knight : soon

after which Henry dashed down a pen, and stamped, and yielded.

Then followed more fanfares and heraldings, while the twilight deepened, as three of Francis' heralds, in solemn deputation with three of Henry's, paced, seeking the parties of horsemen. The Wolsey-gallants they found rowdily drunk within the cavern of one of the hearth-places of Baneleigh Tavern ; and in the Abbot's solar, lounging within the embrasure of a stained window, they found Fitz and Bonner shouting-drunk, and Mac sipping sack ; but not too drunk to understand, for " Bravo ", cried Fitzgerald, " for the Black Knight, who is as gallant a gentleman as ever killed a kern ! and long may he live, if not on earth, in heaven : for here, boysie, have I the falchion he gave me in the forest, and if I do chance to meet him——" drawing the flashing excalibur, he held it aloft.

By which time Du Ballay, Percy, and Alvarada had each received and agreed to the propositions of the Kings ; and now there remained only the question of leadership of the united forces : so back and forth through the now lone plain paced without rest the heralds, lighting the night with pole-torches and cressets : for the Black Knight proposed the leadership to the Golden ; the Golden proposed the leadership to the Black : and, as neither would yield, there arose and wrangled a new deadlock of courtesy.

Finally to all the smaller parties, three of whom at present lay in tents provided them by Francis, once again paced the herald-band on this question of leadership : the Wolsey-gallants and Fitz at the tavern slept deep, but Mac gave his vote for Francis, and so did all, except young Northumberland, who claimed Henry for captain. And so at last Francis yielded with a showing of the teeth, and was leader of the siege.

Now the castle-clock's guts were giving out the sound of midnight, and in the abbey-ruins yonder multitudes of raw-eyed ghosts rose at that toll for matins, while over the wold sounded the far yowling of some lone wolf's mouth,

and round about the battlements tolled the tread of sentries strolling.

At this hour my Lord Cardinal, bending his brow over a plan of the castle, said to a liveryman : " Bring me hither that Calvo " ; and in some minutes in comes Calvo, sullen, slow, with a push-forward of alternate shoulders, his hands clasped behind his back.

Whereat Wolsey, now stepping about the chamber, stopped and faced the sage ; and from the high-tower of his bridled neck he smiled, with : " Now, Mr. Alchymist, you see . . ."

" What see, my Lord of York ? "

" You are my prisoner ".

" I see, yes. I thought you had more sense ".

" How mean you ? "

" Is it not rigolo for a man like me to be in such a position with respect to a man like you ? Have you not yet travelled so far in thought as to know that I am a better man than your Excellency, since I see more, know more ? "

" You are at fault, Sir : for the value of an eye standeth not in what, by study, it hath seen, but in what it is able to see ; in other words, not Knowledge, but Wisdom, is the witness of worth, and the egg of greatness. Thus, although you own more knowledge of chymics than I, I more wisdom of living than you—and so have made you my captive. Come, now ! "

" With many armed men, 'tis not methinks a wisdom so vastly Solomonic to make one man a captive ! "

" But, by wisdom, should you have calculated that I have these many armed men, and skill to captain them ; and so should you have embraced my proffer of terms when I made it you ".

" I did not choose to abandon the girls, that is all ".

" Are they parents of yours ? "

" Nay, strangers : but helpless without me ".

" So ? Then was pride in your skill, and a naughty contumacy, the causes of your resistance to my will ".

" Ah ! that was it ".

" Or was it not rather a good benevolence toward the maidens, meriting praise and honour—— ? "

" What is it you want me for, Sir ? I pray you, preach not to me ; 'twere rigolo verily : my heart is hard ".

Wolsey stepped through the room ; then, coming back, put out his hand, expecting the seer to kiss it : but Calvo languidly shook it.

And now Wolsey : " I consider you honest, and my eyes are good. After this siege you may call me patron ".

Calvo bowed low.

" You know that there *is* a siege, no doubt ? Now, Archimedes at the siege of Syracuse invented burning glasses, and destroyed the enemies' ships : may we not expect something similar from you ? "—here being the real reason of this interview ; and at this comparison with Archimedes—for Wolsey knew how to wrap his flatteries in honey—Calvo, inwardly petted, said : " If I think of anything, I will tell you ; and for the proffer of your puissant protection I give you hearty thanks ".

And with that idea of " thinking of something " he paced a long time that night through the three chambers of his and the sisters' prison at the castle-back ; ascended by a ladder-stair to the battlements, and there paced ; descended and paced—the three chambers spacious and lofty, and they had formerly been rich, being tapestried with sendal ; but now repairs were in progress, for in a corner leant four or five planks, with a great basket-trunk containing tools, scraps of wood, and sawdust.

Now, during the day, on going up by an iron ladder into a sort of loft over one of the rooms, Calvo had noticed among a chaos of old lumber up there a bulky coil of thin rope ; and now, remembering all that length of rope, and looking at the hangings and the planks, he slapped his forehead, muttering : " Hot air is lighter than cold . . . and why should not that fact be applied—— ? Why not ? Seeking hog-wash for the pork, I may have hit upon mainemy-royal for myself . . ."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SIEGE

The loudest blast
That ever filled Renown's obstreperous trump.
Kirke White.

That night, for several miles round about Broughton, every tavern was crowded, and every hamlet awake with revelry : for from far and wide, from many a hall and manor, from many a chase and forest-side, castle and abbey, had come jaunting both lord and lady, keeper and esquire, seneschal and livery-man, tramp and yokel and friar, justice and reeve and martialist ; the Bishop of Winchester, gallant prelate of the Order of the Garter, slept at Sudbury Rye ; the High Sheriff of the County at Baneleigh Tavern ; and still when the morning broke roads were brisk with trains of horses jogging all toward Broughton Vale : for the renown of this joust of arms had spread far, rousing the tough and merry heart of England.

So when the sun clomb up, away back toward the tavern was to be seen a region of heads stretched out into vagueness, only the castle-plain being now empty, for there the old kettledrums named " nakers " were pattering to arms, trumpets calling in the air, the battlements of the castle were embattled with men ; and now down the escarpment from the outer drawbridge trotted a body of men to the barbican, among them three of the seven castle-priests, and a fourth priest not of the castle, who himself directed the defence.

A hasty meal had been eaten now in both the camps : so now three batteries of eighteen guns bolted out from the camp of Francis, galloping south after ponderous Norman horses, while a battery and a half of nine galloped

north from the camp of Harry, to meet the three ; and, as they met, a shower of arblast-arrows from a bastion chaunted a sound in the air, falling far short. So commenced the day.

And forthwith from both camps broke two arrays of horsemen, showing lances and drawn blades, cantering in phalanx, Francis and his troop raven-black from their plumes to their shoes, the other King's troop winking like a blotch of sunset on a wobbling water : and, as the batteries advanced at a walk toward the castle, these two troops fell in behind the batteries, the French troop containing all the smaller groups engaged in the quest of Laura Ford, except the knights watching the hind part of the castle.

Suddenly the barbican barked—a stone ball from a thirty-three pounder demi-cannon plunging into the earth, to spurt dirt upon the besieging limbers thirty yards away ; whereat the artillery-horses reared and bounded, and Francis behind his beaver laughed, liking that sound.

Now down the ranks of the bristling phalanx he briskly pricked, riding with ease the choppy sea of his riotous charger, marking the facts of Henry's men, where the axes were, where the pikes and carbines, and how many, and in what formation ; while Henry, collared with the collar of the Garter, and all a glory of golden spots, eyed him gloweringly behind his visor, gnawing his pout ; and, as Francis began to talk, well he recognised that shrill and jolly voice.

" I wish ", Francis shrilled in syllabled English, " that we attack now the outwork barbican, beginning with cannon, and at the apt and gracious instant making dash with scaling-ladders, petards, grenadoes. My aim, you conjecture, is not so much the taking of the barbican itself as the expelling of its defenders : an event which will prompt the warders of the outer drawbridge to let down the bridge for the admittance of their friends, while we are yet busied on the outwork. Now, a lowered drawbridge is the soldier's chance, as saith the proverb. You archers, you halberds, you

carbines, and all the left half of my front-rank men, will therefore dismount now, at the lifting of my sword, and your animals will be led backward by the rest to yonder hillock beyond the range of shot. There will the non-fighters stand, dismounted, to the second when my clarion, sounded from the outwork, shall announce its defenders routed : and then will they spring to saddle, gallop like blackriders, and grip by surprise one or—la !—*both* of the bridges at the edge of the sword. Artillery—halt ! Knights and warriors—I lift my sword ! "

Bustling movement ensued on his bellow, men jumping from horses, snatching at their weapons, half the host cantering backward with led horses, among them Henry, keenly piqued at a post of inaction. At the same moment a puff of smoke started out of an embrasure of the outwork-barbican, and another thirty-three-pounder from a mortar's mouth burst upon the assaulters almost as soon as the report, coming with crash and fracas upon a scaling-ladder carried on a gun-carriage, crushing a gunner, and thence rushing down the slope.

The reply was swift. The line of the assailants' artillery, now within the eight hundred yards' range of its sakers and culverins, opened fire : and immediately it was as though there peered above-ground the broad countenance of some ogre, breathing smokes, with twenty-seven eyeballs of fire, the shock sounding like a single hoot—the ogre's *ho !* of astonishment. In some moments the outwork looked only a cloud of powdered stone ; out of the cloud, however, sounded boomings, came spouts of flame ; and balls were playing all in the air beyond the hotchpot of the juggler's hand, the attackers' gunners, black as slugs, in a flutter of action, eagerly cleaning, spying up muzzles, ramming for life ; and first done first fire : so that now the fire was in the quavers and semiquavers of that gruff organ-board, two notes with brisk bang-bang, or three, then pause and minim, then competitive mixed brawl of many a voice, then demisemiquaver bang-bang, in twos and threes. And

suddenly yonder along that key-board of cylinders there springs aloft a throng of splintered metal and timber, mixed with reek and limbs of men, for a falconet has burst in a turbulence of hubbub as it barked, as falconets were apt to do ; and of the juggler's-balls in the air some fall well, cracking carriages, horses, men, some ploughing up pebbles that shoot like pistol-shots, two swooping even to the infantry fifty yards to the rear : but they must not touch Francis prancing betwixt artillery and infantry, and anon ducking with a half-playful upward glance, for the observation of Henry is on him.

It lasted full four hours, till now the sun was burning hot in the forenoon : and thirteen of the twenty-seven cannon were burst, twenty gunners mangled : and the barbican, where Wolsey was a marksman, stood good.

So Francis put hand to side, and blew the bugle of retirement : whereat the two troops rode back, bearing seven wounded, each to its camp ; and the stagnant smoke, which grew like ghost-cotton out of the ground, now faded slowly away, while the sun stole to sultry afternoon during a dumbness of the tomb. But again at the ringing of two o'clock, the two artilleries galloped out with a blundering row, and the black host, and the golden—to take stand as before.

And with hope : for the surface of the outwork was now deep-eaten, pounded rough, and at the very first round now the assailants shouted cheers, as a cake of masonry disengaged itself and came down in powder ; in half-an-hour a breach appeared : and Francis, casting his bridle to an esquire, went calling, inviting, with forward-pointing sword.

Then followed the hot "dash" rolled in smoke, riddled with shot, afflicted with arrows, as when one wins blinking bitter way in the face of wind and weather. Fast now dropped the warriors, as they pressed nearer and nearer within range of quarrel-headed shaft and shot of every form, rained not only from the barbican itself, but from the closest of the bastions, while backward through the press of the assaulters brawled brands of red—pine-torches snatched

from the cannon-carriages to fire the petard-fuses ; ten scaling-ladders, over-lying the mass of the phalanx, sailed steadily toward their aim ; and always the cannon, both of battery and barbican, brabbled, winking in quick semi-quaver bang-bangs, or brawling chords of competitive uproars ; while Francis, always in advance, called and invited, with one forward-pointed knee, and wildly-pointing steel.

But although the dash was hot, and costly, and rash, the result was not slow : melted lead drizzling from window-slit and battlement, and ladders cast backward with all their freight, could not save, nor petards and angry grenadoes crackling in a distraction of scattering fury, doing red-hot execution everywhere, bounding back, some of them, with shouts of spouting rouge upon their throwers ; and, on the intrusion into the hole opened in the upper story of the shoulders of the French king, a general roar of " *Sauve qui peut !* " rose to the men on the roof, who now rushed down pell-mell, their captain among them, his nose as black as his robe, to cut a passage through a brief sword-scrimmage with three of the assailants now in the upper story, and to manage, save four slain, to scuttle through the trap to the lower stage, slamming above their heads the slab named " peerplate ".

Of the assaulters now swarming, all of them, over the barbican some were told off to beat upon the peerplate, to make it appear that the assailants were concentrating themselves upon it, while Francis sat hiding behind the battlement above ; so after some moments, as he expected, the barbican's sally-port opened ; there followed an out-rush of its defenders ; and, as they rushed, the drawbridge began to move down for them ; and, as down it moved, Francis put bugle to mouth.

Now was the chance of Harry. The cavalry, waiting half a mile away, spurred forward : and all the castle, from donjon to curtain, in an alarm of surprise, rushed to its self-defence.

The horsemen rode therefore into a rain of missiles which thickened as they advanced ; but before ever the barbican-men were half-way across the drawbridge, the horsemen were dashing on foot upon it, their abandoned horses ranging over a plain now well strewn with the corpses of men and brutes. But the besiegers here were near to the two nearest bastions of the curtain, which hurled upon them a purgatory of arrows, while, on the other hand, the won out-work now turned its guns upon its own mother ; the assaulters' artillery also galloped up, and talked ; and all the air was a racket of intricate war, distracted with crackle, whizz, and cannons acting.

And still on pressed the cavaliers, fresh men against faint, Henry foremost, after him Brandon, Nevil, Knevet ; and once, at the last moment before the portal, some of the rushing barbican-men spun sharp with cocked blunder-busses and horse-pistols, one covering with his muzzle the royal bosom ; and he fired ; but the muzzle was knocked up by a quick fist—Wolsey's—who hissed " Daw ! " and flew on.

Now the outer drawbridge was not long in being taken ; the warders slain ; the chains axed ; and, since the inner remained aloft, the flyers, after a hand-to-hand fight with the axe of Harry and the knights, cast themselves down the escarpment of the inner moat, to become in the water the target of wanton missiles from the victors.

The captors of the barbican having now dashed down to join in the storm, four of the outer bastions were captured at the sword's point and occupied : and to defend the castle hardly forty men were now left. After garrisoning these bastions with guards, the bugle of Francis blew, the fortress now all but won, the sun low to its going down.

During all which Bessie Ford was seated on a planchette within one of the machicolations near the donjon-battlements, clad now in a homespun of camlet bestowed on her by a farmer's wife ; and wide-eyed she remained there,

tightly holding a hand of Laura : for they had the liberty to ascend a small stair, and so gain the top ; and, her chin in her hand, as she gazed numb through all the long day's action and to-do, the thought in her heart was : " Can all this affairing be on account of my sister Laura ? . . . Oh, my boding heart ! "

But, as for the sage, he was below in their three chambers, labouring grimly, forgetting the siege, Bessie Ford, himself, and all things : full only of interest in a thought of Nature, a new thing which he would do with his brain.

And ever as he toiled, he said to himself : " Hot air *is* lighter than cold . . . "

After making calculations and drawings, he had cut from one of the ash-planks leaning there two discs two feet across, in the circumference of which he had cut notches (mortices) all round, and sideways through the cogs, or tenons, had bored holes to admit a wire ; then had set to work to saw laths, thin and pliant, two inches wide to fit the notches in the discs, sixteen of them ; then had bored holes to admit a wire through the width of each lath at each end, the ends having been left thick ; and with a wire from his bag he had secured these within the notches of the two discs ; and now, standing on a table, placing one disc against a wall and pushing the other, he could open to an orange-shape this double-umbrella, the extremities of the laths being bevelled a little, so as to turn freely, and hollowed a little, so as to be flush with the notches' curved face, the laths ending in coffin-heads to fit the notches with a nice joinery.

The rooms being in a lumber of disorder, due to repairs going forward, he felt no apprehension that the menial who bore his meals, and never entered the chamber in which he worked, would observe his work : for even an attempt to escape, he knew, must seem foolish, the situation of the chambers being what it was.

By midnight of the first day's storm he had fared thus far in his fervid labours.

CHAPTER XXIX

ARMS AND A MAN

" Lo yonder the thane of Crumbauchty ! "
The tother woman said again :
" Of Moray yonder I see the thane ",
The third then said : " I see the King ".
Andrew of Wynton.

The great vague throng which had watched from afar the first day's storm, reassembled afar with the next dawn.

And when the sun rose they waited for the loud sound of arms ; but now no sounds came : only, on the plain, in a natural cricket-pitch, bordered by rising ground on both sides, they saw men driving stakes. So by twos and threes, by tens and hundreds, with growing boldness, they drifted nearer, to see the men enclosing the length of the pitch in palisades, leaving doorways at the narrow ends—creating lists for a tournament of arms. And at once a thrill throed the multitude.

But now there broke out a blaring of horns like the blares of that first day of heralds ; and again there came pacing an embassy in an emblazoned glory of gold and taffeta and tissue-cloth, cordelière and egrette and cordon, differing from the glory of that first day as one star from another in glory : from the Black Knight they came, and made for the camp of the Golden.

For it was necessary to arrange the conditions of the coming joust, what constituted a round, the arms, the hours, the marshals of the ceremony, the umpire : so back and fore paced the heralds blaring ; a clouded sun climbed from nine to ten, from ten to eleven, and still they paced and blared.

Now a drizzling that persisted throughout the day

commenced to haunt the air, but the throng did not budge from round the lists, eating picnic cheer, staring hour after hour at the embassies repassing ; until at last a sign of business was seen, when ten trumpeters, red-clad in mantelets of Venice-gold, rode into the lists, to take stand at a corner of the oblong ; while from the other camp ten in cloth-of-tissue cloaks, raised with silver damask, came to take stand diagonally opposite.

Then came a body of men-at-arms riding back the throng from the lists, with cries of " Field ! Field ! " ; and immediately followed a number of men bearing tents, of which they pitched one near the north, narrow, end of the lists for Francis, one at the south for Henry ; three also on the east side, two on the west, for the other fighters : all being as richly barbaric as the tents of Asiatics.

Now expectation stood on tiptoe, for the trumpeters blared, as the two marshals of the day entered at opposite ends ; and, as the castle-clock tolled noon, the crowd fell back both north and south before two cantering parties, one Henry's, the other Francis'. As these sprang down at their tent-doors, there were other canterers : and ere long the seven tents had occupants.

Then occurred an interval, during which the two marshals (Charles Brandon and the Chevalier d'Arcy) met and conferred in minutes that were hours to the crowd; and there were some other ados and carryings-on incomprehensible to many, as to Bessie staring through a machicolation of the donjon, where anon Laura gave a single hand-clap, and wriggled gaily on the planchette ; till now at last Charles Brandon, stepping backward, bawled aloud : " The Knight of Norfolk and The Seeker ! " and down the lists in opposite directions went he and his fellow at a trot, each crying aloud three times : " The Knight of Norfolk and The Seeker ! "

And while the trumpets stormed, one horseman entered the lists at the northern, one at the southern doorway.

Since the first-arrived before the castle was to fight the

second-arrived, the victor the third, and so on, the first-arrived being the Wolsey-men, their captain Havard, having stripped from his horse every cognizance of the Cardinal, and having adopted the style of " The Knight of Norfolk ", now advanced to encounter the second-arrived, Alvarada, under the style of " The Seeker ". Alvarada was cased in simple Spanish plate-coat, complete from greaves to neck-piece, a morion on his head ; but, as he wore no visor, his classic-featured visage was visible to Henry, who, at his tent-door, sat palm on knee, sullenly watching ; while Francis, at his tent-door, lolled gossiping among his gallants, casually glancing anon at what went on.

The lists, five hundred yards long, offered room for impetus : the two riders spurred ; the chargers, with frisked tails, spurted to combat ; galloping fast, faster, they got nigh—met—hacked quick, stretching far sideways, two whistling hacks—and passed.

To spin, and re-engage : not a whisper now from all that tip-toeing throng of onlookers, while with chop and chop acted the clashing falchions : but from the first *botte* it was observed that " The Seeker " was here dominant and the aggressor : and, at a raising of the sword-arm of his antagonist to hack over-helm, Alvarada, sticking his point into a joint of the cuirass, pricked the heart : so that Havard dropped, his animal scampering through the lists, dragging him a little, then, agallop, went spreading far a rumpus of alarm among the furrowed multitude, while the trumpets mouthed, and the Spaniard pricked his stallion once round about the lists, then back to his tent : whereupon men came and laid the dead on a litter ; they spread upon him a cerement ; they led him thence for ever ; while Henry, sitting, tilted his head behind a goblet of gingered ypocras, and Francis was lisping to a chevalier that " The English girl is to the French as a peach is to an oyster . . . "

Now afresh the marshals confabulated with strange

delay : till Charles Brandon, stepping backward, cried aloud : " The Seeker and the Knight Courtman ! " and up and down the lists went the two marshals trotting—like ecstatic newsboys trotting, bawling—crying that three times aloud.

" Knight Courtman " being the style adopted by Du Ballay, into the lists from opposite ends rode Alvarada and the portly prelate, the prelate cap-à-pie in plated mail, very minutely arabesqued in silver, his steed, too, heavy with steel : and the two riders spurred ; the chargers, with frisked tails, spurted to combat ; galloping fast, faster, they got nigh—met—hacked quick, stretching far sideways, two whistling hacks—and passed.

With fleet check and wheel to re-engage : and there were seconds thronged with chops, then pause and re-adjustment of the two stepping chargers, then seconds thronged with passions of chopping, in squalls and spasms ; till at last Du Ballay's bulky blade, blustering, broke the corselet of Alvarada at the collar-bone, drawing a daub of blood ; upon which the Spaniard steeply reared on his haunches, and so dropped down, that now the horses were side by side, head-to-haunch and haunch-to-head. The quicker hand and wit was at this instant the victor, each having the other's nape : and both chopped ; but at the moment of Du Ballay's chop he experienced a cuff on the cheek, fiercely inflicted by Alvarada's left fist ; his stroke failed ; at the same time the Spaniard cut twice, quick ; and Du Ballay dived over his saddle-bow, blood flowing from his visor-bars.

The Spaniard pricked once round the lists, while the trumpets blustered ; then cantered back to tent.

At the same time Fitzgerald, sitting at his tent-door on the wet sward, chin cocked aloft on fist, remarked : " That is sure the carle with which I fought at the Bell Inn, Mac ".

" It is ", said Mac : " sound fighter, that, sound fighter ".

" He learned war in his fifteen minutes with Fitz ", observed Bonner.

" Boysie "—Fitzgerald laid his hand on Bonner's.

Now the prostrate churchman was carted off, the trumpets stuttered, the marshals conferred, the sun hid himself midway in his setting quadrant ; and always the drizzle reigned, vague like the ghost of rain, haunting forest and horse and gold-lace, and the patient gazing host.

At last Charles Brandon exclaimed : " The Seeker and George Percy ! " and, this having been thrice cried, Alvarada for the third time entered the lists, confronted now with the martial youth of Percy of Northumberland, borne on a huge and rather raw-boned animal of Wold-breed in shabby trappings. Ponderously panoplied, his Roman face was yet open to the day, and from under his morion popped loose, like the mature cocoon, the mass of his locks of flax, he looking short on his large charger, his left palm back on her haunch, as calmly he went forward at a walk ; and Anne Boleyn, watching in the throng, felt a tightening of the heart, for she had loved him ; while Bessie, too, from her watch-height, knew him ; and Henry, prying at his face, as it moved nigh by, vented from bosom and nostril a " H'm ! " of meditative surprise.

They pricked—they galloped near—to a contest betwixt sword and battle-axe, the boy's bridle-arm still sick from a cut by Fitz, Alvarado having in his chest a slash which, but for the tension of that hour, might have laid him on his back ; but he came galloping with the same gallantry, his black eyes bright with the inspiration of a cup of Xeres just drained.

They met : and at once with clattering brusquerie and spurts of sparks the battle began, the steel of Percy's slenderly-curved axe notching the sword of Alvarada, cleaving his armour, every time. The defect, however, of the axe is its powerlessness to stab—a defect which bred the invention of the halberd ; and at a moment when the cuirass of the Spaniard ran three streams, a prick in the ribs caused Percy to close his spurs briskly in a spasm : forward a little spurted his horse ; and, as he turned to

hack, the brow of the Spaniard's horse having by now forged forward to his saddle-bow, Alvarada quickly, thrice, plunged his sword-tip into the other's hip ; upon which Percy's spurs once again jogged his flanks ; and when in consequence his axe cleft only air, he, grinning, with a face all pallor, gagged his horse, spinning again to hack ; but his eyes closed, his saddle rolled with blood ; Anne Boleyn uttered a cry ; the boy lay bloodily bloodless on the soil.

The Spaniard pricked once round the lists, while the trumpets blustered ; then cantered back to tent, as Henry stood up at his tent-door : he the fifth arrived.

There followed a longer interval than usual, during which Francis sent from his tent a fresh coat-of-mail to the Spaniard, with the Black Knight's admiring compliments. And the marshals confabulated ; the trumpets somehow set to blaring at a wrong moment, and were hushed with frantic gesticulations by the marshals ; at Henry's tent Nevil, Knevet, and ten others were now flurriedly busy round the King's steed, a gleaming negro, not big, barely able to wield Henry's weight with ease, meditating there with a dogged neck, meaningly nibbling the bit, with nods.

When at last Harry was remarked to be mounted and waiting the marshals bustled : Charles Brandon ran with a mouth that called some last thing in a shouted whisper to one bunch of the trumpeters ; the Chevalier d'Arcy darted after him ; Charles span round to him ; they flurriedly whispered together something unguessable ; Charles, spinning round, again ran shouting his momentous whisper: and all was ready.

" The Seeker and the Golden Knight ! " they three times cried, running, and the spluttering trumpets crowed.

So, for the fourth time, Alvarada enters by the northern end, Henry by the southern, he being a mere blaze, his stallion in latticed trappings of damasked cloth-of-gold, with buckles and pendants of fretted bullion, his sword-hilt brutal with rubies, the blade a Toledo damascened with

gold—and under the King the Man-Boy, with two thick hands, a bright brain, and good blue eyes.

They pricked, they galloped briskly nigh, they met, while Francis yonder pretended still to gossip and prattle, but with his eyes fixed on that tryst : and very quickly the pretence itself failed on his lips. Hold ! has the Spaniard, then, lost the trick of victory ? Step by step the sorrel is backing, step by step the black with tossing neck is encroaching, while Henry, with encroaching authority, is recklessly raining rains of strokes over the stranger's crest. But with damage only to steel and to one slashed ear : for the Spaniard, though dumbfounded by that trouncing, is yet not without counsel : he prances in a *demi-volte*, parrying, as he does it, a descending cut, and is at Henry's flank, well rescued from that rough weather.

Now the animals sidle, idly prancing ; there is a full minute's manœuvring into fresh relationship ; and now the Spaniard's lids are lowered over eyes hawk-like in their intensity, as the two right arms lift, ready, waiting, while the chargers step a little ; until, chop, chop, twice, sudden as thunder, bolts out Henry's blade upon Alvarada's left arm, but upon metal ; and, chop, once, bolts out Alvarado's upon Henry's, but—upon bone !

The King, all one tingling groan, digs rowels to ribs, and goes like the wind, as if fleeing, northward, the Spaniard after him, but languidly in comparison ; till suddenly Henry is galloping the other way—at eagle speed, speeding with him, laid in rest, a demi-lance of gleaming steel and ashen shaft, unslung from his saddle : and monstrous is the double speed, as they meet, they crash. Now Alvarada's sure eye does not fail—he actually does strike up the lance, but too soon, or too weakly, for it redescends to its exact *atteinte*, meeting his gorget in the little depression at the centre in front ; whereupon the steel bends, and still bends, until tip-toe expectation awaits the pop and shivery clash —bends, but does not break. Backward tilt man and animal —backward still more, under that earnest, coaxing

urgency : now is the decision of the balance, now the moment, the overthrow ; over thumps the whole lump flat ; the Spaniard's neck raps a stone, and he remains there motionless.

The King tossed his front-hoofs, foxing on his pommel, round the ring, a trotting pomp, cock of all the walks.

And " Now ", quoth Francis to a chevalier, showing his little teeth, " will you see my Heat ' *quick quenched* ' "— for the Black Knight was the sixth-arrived before the castle.

As for Henry, alighted at his tent-door, he drank wine, his breath venting in strong fans from his nostrils, while upon his shape the eyes of Bessie in her watch-tower were fastened with a fascinated stare : for *he*, so far, was victor ; and her hands were clammy.

Clammy also the hands of Anne, as she saw that lank form of Francis saunter into his tent ; clammy the hands of Wolsey, looking from the castle, apprehensive for his Henry ; while yonder, at the side of the lists, lying idly with propped chin on the drizzled sward, Fitzgerald resettled his athletic length to say : " I bet on the Black, Mac ".

" A sound fighter, the Golden ", said Mac with a judicial nod—" sound fighter ".

" Goes too earnest to work ", criticised Fitz, " nor light enow. A fighting-man is not a woodman felling elms, now : as I once knew an Irish kern who pricked me off six palemen at once, whistling the while. A furious levity—that's it. A great fighter must be a man of humour, born so. Faith, I bet on the Black ".

And " Oh, Fitz, Fitz ", cries Bonner, " if thou wilt quench them all for me, Black, Golden, and all, under that smothering sword of thine, six kisses shall I give thee on each hacked cheek ! for then shall Bess be thine, and Laura mine ! " Fitz pressed the hand of his boy.

But the interval was long. The sun began to in-gather the blurred colours of his setting. The trumpeters themselves

at one time deserted the empty lists. And ever the enwrapping drizzle acted, like a law of nature.

Now, however, finally, there is movement and revival. When trumpets blew it was understood that the moment was come ; Brandon and d'Arcy were seen to lay mysterious heads together ; and soon, amid a great vague tumult, multitudinous like a noising of far waters, Francis and Henry were remarked to be in their saddles at their tent-doors.

Trotting now went the two marshals shouting three times to the four winds : " The Golden Knight and the Black Knight ! "

And at once, even from the two doorways, the two steeds burst into full speed at the burning spur—with them flashing two lances in rest.

In that minute Henry's face was a grim crimson, and the teeth of Francis grinned—here a meeting of rivals—the final decision—all life piled into one tip-top instant ; and Fitzgerald, staring, threw behind him a " Look ! *there* flies Style on horseback, if you like ! " for Francis is bounding as buoyantly along as a flower that, bounding along, rides the roughness of some flying flood ; and Macdonald whispers " *Sh-h-h !* ", just as the two steeds meet with horrid check, slipping on their wrinkled haunches, and the two steels, with a chilly clash, splinter on the two casques. But the sherds have but reached the earth when swords leap ; they cross, lunge, chop, the Black sitting straight-backed on his saddle, the Golden encroaching, standing on his stirrups, eagerly reaching. The management of both animals being punctilio itself, they step and move as if by instinct, in a steady relationship : no pause : a minute, two, three, the edges continue their desperate parley, until Francis, in a movement too emphatic of his steed, receives near the top of the neck-piece a chop which pierces, drawing red ; but at that moment his eyes brighten like two black moonlights behind his bars : for now, at last, the outcome is in sight. As the English King's weapon

descends quick to the same spot again, and rests on solid, Francis with his excalibur chops it : it drops broken ; as Henry sighs to Heaven, Francis feints an over-helm chop ; and, as Henry bridles sharply upon his haunches, Francis buries his blade deep in the chamfron of the charger—deep in its brain. Henry is already ready with his battle-axe when the animal comes back dead from its rear and dives crashing into the ground, while out goes the King's right arm like some reaching swimmer's, as he pitches steep, swinging far the axe. But he is nimble : one swift scramble and he is on his legs again—his hand seeking his dagger, seizing it, lifting it a little, and now flinging it to the ground in angry agony—the arm which has saved his fall dislocated : he stands *hors de combat.*

A bearded boy, ill-disciplined, ill-bred, obstreperous, barbarian, Henry took his beating badly, stamping from the field, his nose wrinkled, hissing : " Black-faced Goat ? Ugly French Beast ? In my own God's land ? But *I'll have her* . . . ! "

As for Francis, he cantered once lightly about the lists, and went back to tent—smiling now a little.

By which time Macdonald had leapt up, was at Fitz's charger, stooping, tugging at the bardwise trappings, trying the steadiness of the saddle-bow, smoothing a pastern, muttering counsels into the horse's nostrils—a present to Fitzgerald of the day-of-siege from the free-handed Francis, who had given it with axe, lance, and harness complete.

Fitz with his friends was the seventh, and last, arrived : for they, without horses, had come to the castle on foot.

It was no longer day, but beginning twilight, when he rose from his length on the grass and looked at the castle-front, remembering that behind it was Bessie Ford ; and she, gazing intently through the grey air, saw his stature, and with fainting heart muttered : " Isn't he a big one . . ? "

So, anxious to finish the tourney before further darkness, Francis quickly reappeared, mounted, before his tent, sipping from a cup.

Now the delay was short before the trumpets blared and the marshals called, while Fitz, with one foot on his stirrup, drew Bonner's head to his side, where Bonner, nestling it, said : " Fight roughly, Fitz, an you love me ! ", as to the four winds went the cry : " The Black Knight and Garrett Oge Fitzgerald ! "

And into the lists cantered the champions, Francis from the north, Fitz from the south, he passing close to Harry sitting there, who went " H'm ! ", looking out with a desperate interest, a peep of hope, toward the outcome of this meeting.

The speeds intensify : Francis having given well, like a royal good fellow, Fitz's horse flies blithely to the spur ; Fitz's sword is the gift of Francis, his spear, his axe—all good ; and he is full of elation as he gallops there, like one taking exercise in the element to which he was born, is large and confident, as Francis also is large and confident, both masters, calmly omnipotent, corks on the stormiest tip-top waters—as always the Master is ! Fitz in the nick of time descries that Francis, as he comes on his flood, comes with lance in rest, so has just space to dash back sword to scabbard, snatch lance, lay it to the *atteinte*. They meet : the two steels shrilly shiver. They draw : with quick intercourse wink those blades, whose better is not below the sun, and one fraction of an inch's sin will bring-on instant catastrophe.

They cannot vanquish one the other : here Mars has met Ares—each his match. Francis is, may-be, by a shadow the more agile, the iron of Fitz's wrist, may-be, by a trifle the more inexorable. By the twinkling of an eye Francis sights an advantage, chops at the collar-bone, and must enter, if he meets it : for Fitz has absolutely no armour save a steel morion and a scanty ring-mail habergeon, sleeved to the elbow, bulged by his buxom breasts ; but, as the blade of Francis descends, it is met by the equally precious blade of Fitz ; and *click* go the two falchions, split like glass, mutually destructive, dropping in common ruin.

Now is the régime of the axe—but it lasts not one half-minute ! for the horses presently step into such a head-to-head relation, that the destruction of both, with two such blades, is sure. Francis hacks at the chamfron ; Fitz, a half-second after, farther back between the ears ; both steeds tumble from their rear with immediate suddenness : and the men fall. But of the two Francis can hardly be said to fall : for by some miracle of agility he is extricated from his charger almost as it drops ; Fitz ponderously tumbles, and rolls once.

Cause enough has he now to laud his scantiness of armour ! for in a flash the edge of Francis is impending upon him. That edge, however, encounters the top-ring of his axe-hole, and within six ticks he is towering over Francis, dominant, authoritative, wielding his steel like Thor : there are some seconds wherein he raises such outcries from the loud-mouthed metal in distress of the French King, that the lists ring with the row of it, while, if the front of his own mail-shirt is stained, Francis' cuirass runs ; and " Gallant Fitz ! " hisses Macdonald, shivering on tip-toe yonder, " hew, madman, hew ! " Fitz hews. Francis staggers to his back. Fitz, at him, has a dagger at his bars.

" Oh, I yield, I yield ", laughs Francis—leaps lightly up with a light laugh that sobs—falls again—leaps again, trying, with a sobbing laugh, to shake Fitz's hand—faints in the arms of Fitz ; while, behind the battlements's crenels above there, Bessie has sprung upright with bright eyes, with clapping hands, with " Oh, in good sooth, grandest of warriors, rollickest of gallants, he ! " but then collapses, sobbing, remembering that he, too, even he, is against her . . . And Harry, too, at his door was upright with clapped hands : for Francis had been vanquished ! and Christendom should learn it ! and the girl was Fitzgerald's—and Fitzgerald, and the gallows on Tyburn-hill, were *his*.

CHAPTER XXX

HOT AIR

Il amusait le peuple de la ville en faisant sortir du fonds d'un puits un corps lumineux semblable à la lune. *D'Herbelot.*

Of all this Mauro Calvo saw nothing, busy all that day again ; and, while the castle was being again stormed, he was busy far into the night, like one who, on finding hid diamonds, forgets all in digging.

He had now passed a piece of his coil of rope, knotted at one end, through holes in the two discs of his double-umbrella, this rope carrying at its middle a third disc fixed to it, so that when he pushed to open the thing out, this third disc prevented the laths from bending inward.

By this time, too, he had taken down some of the sendal-silk hangings, had cut out sixteen pieces of silk, leaflike (with the points snipped off), and next proceeded to cover his frame-work of sixteen laths with these silks, taping them to the laths by means of a gimlet and string of silk. He was half through this work, when, with a start, he heard, far off, renewed rumours of war booming through the dark ; and tremulously thenceforth he toiled on, strange noises of brawlings meantime reaching his ears from beyond his locked portal, uproars of distracted grenadoes crackling, calls, echoes, darting runners, with chords as of the organ, and voices of sorrow wailing, and ever, like vague gongs, a going-off of guns, his taper now glaring waveringly upon a face pale, nay, awful, sweat bathing his corpse's-brow, that serenity of his eyes now altered all to wildness.

The edges of the sixteen leaf-shapes being now taped to the laths, where there seemed a little wrinkle or crevice he smeared the place with some melted shellac from his sack,

to make the whole more or less hermetic ; in doing which, he could hear three strokes of the castle-clock through the roaring of the two storms—a storm of wind, too, roaring : and he understood that it was midnight.

He flew then to a pricket-candlestick that was in the room, good for use as a grapnel or anchor ; he tied its base to an end of the rope which passed through the two discs, then tied the other end of its stem to one of two long ropes that he had cut from the coil : in doing which, he sniffed, lifted his head, to see the room now pervaded with smoke ; and he ran out an instant to the platform at the castle-back outside his rooms—the platform a spacious area enclosed by three walls and a balustrade—to see the air now encrimsoned, the castle now evidently in flames. Seeing, too, with satisfaction, that the wind was still from the east, winging from the castle toward the forest beyond, back he darted to his task, calling to Laura and Bessie : " Prepare yourselves, you two—— ! ", and within some moments had shouldered his slim silken work, to turn and manœuvre it through a door out to the platform. But, since sparks were now about on the winds, a new fear of them seized him, and his movements flew into lunacy, as back he ran to bring out a table, to stand on it, to lay one disc against one end-wall of the platform, to push at the other disc until the spar of silk was needle-shape, was melon-shape, was orange-shape, his face now red with effort ; then to fix the orange-shape with a peg pushed into the rope ; and finally to tie the globe to the coping of the platform-balustrade.

Even here he could hear that the castle was now full of shouts ; and he called : " Come, you . . ."

The two girls, at the door, stood wondering at this monster orange which rocked and bumped, while Calvo ran-in trembling, came back with his sack, fastened it to the rope under the lower disc ; then ran in again, and came back with two cylinders of tin flaming ; ran-in again and came back with two more flaming-cylinders, which he had

cut with a hack-saw from a tin stackpipe, and had hammered into them, for bottoms, wooden discs, with discs of tin tacked over ; then had filled the four cylinders with fragments of wood, pitch, shellac, and had saturated all with naphtha from his sack : so that a touch of the taper had caused the mass to pop into flame. These cylinders he now pushed into four holes, cut out with a keyhole-saw for their reception in the lower disc, true fits, so that the cylinders were kept in place by friction ; but now the four flames were in horrid proximity to the rope that kept the orange an orange—" horrid ", though the rope thereabouts had been protected with wire wound round it ; now, too, the globe of silk began to strain and creak at the air-pressure within, even though a gimlet-hole had been pierced in the upper disc as a vent-hole.

Now Calvo undid the long rope from the coping of the balustrade : the orange rose, bumped back ; and now the sage waited in a craziness of expectation, hearing the conflagration of the donjon now in grand swelter, flames coming out from casements, while up on high the spangled gonfalon of ravin floated across a sky of gores, and all in the loud air reigned a strangeness of tones and sounds, as when men in dreams shout weakly in the centre of a clamouring of cataracts.

The orange rose—bumped back—would rise no more : and, as when the treasure-searcher finds the casket there, but empty, and the world all rags and anguish still, so was the sage's face.

Evidently, though, the orange wanted to ascend, if it could—some solace here for the inventor ; and when Calvo in crazy haste began to cast out a lot of objects from his bag, suddenly the bag struck him in the throat, tossed him sprawling, the orange off.

Never did fall fill a mortal with meed so sweet ; and, on his feet in a moment, he snatched at the running rope, which was wrapped once round the coping, and so held it, as it paid out, staring skyward with delighted eyes.

But the orange had hardly gained an elevation of forty feet when its ascension ceased because of the increasing weight of the rope which it drew out, and because a hole rimmed with spreading red was already in the silk, some wind having whiffed one of the flames that way, or some spark having fastened on it, and the wasting silk was shrivelling from a writhing edge of fire : so at once it commenced to fall, racing all the time at the rate of forty miles an hour down the north-eastern storm beneath a vault all reek and sparks from the castle ; while two of the assaulters who had guarded the castle-back—two who were still on guard there beyond the back curtain-wall—regarded with straining throats that most strange moon, the last thing which they assumed being that here was a thing of human making.

When it dropped steeply into the forest Calvo pulled at the rope, which, when some yards of it had come in, ceased to come, fixed somewhere in thicket by the prickets of the candlestick ; whereupon he sprang upon the table to pass the rope between the door and its jamb, and to tie the rope, now resting on the upper door-hinge, round the door. He now had a bridge of rope, inclined at fifteen degrees to the horizon, between castle and forest. And now he ran into the room, to come back with a wicker-trunk in which had been a host of tools, to the corners of which he had attached short ropes, and to one of its wicker handles had attached his second long rope : so, standing on the table, he tied the short ropes together over the bridge-rope, to make a sliding " cage " of the trunk ; and now said : " Come, come, you two . . ."

Laura shrank from it, until Bessie whispered her, " Come, Laura, do what he says ", drawing her to the table ; and as soon as they were in the trunk knee to knee, the seer let them slip down the bridge, holding the trunk's rope to check their career, a shriek now pealing out of Laura the instant she found herself swinging over outhouses' roofs, with forty feet of ruin yawning beneath her beauty.

Then when the rope ceased to run the seer drew back

the trunk, heaped into it the things that he had thrown out of his sack, and, having tied that rope-end, too, round the door, went sliding down, holding to the rope to check his rush. He arrived presently in an oak-tree, within which the laths stuck, collapsed ; and at the tree's foot were the two, looking up.

By which time all the castle was being ransacked by the stormers for Calvo and the damsels, Henry himself entering the very chambers whence the sage had lately vanished ; and he was hurrying back along a corridor rolled in smoke when before him he saw a wonder !—Wolsey coming toward him.

Here was confirmation of the incredible rumour that Wolsey was in the castle, had brought the maidens thither ; and " How now, my Lord Cardinal ? *You !* " said Henry.

And Wolsey, now large in cardinal-red : " Your Grace is safe ! "

" *You* here, my lord ? *You !* "

" This moment arrived from London, Sire : had tidings that my King was in peril——"

" This moment ? My lord, your arriving is wondrous well timed ! "—regarding him with an underlook dark with suspicion.

" Which makes me the more happy, Sire ".

" But 'tis said that you were in the castle all the time ! "

" Which castle, Sire ? "

" God on high, man, there are not five million castles ! "

" But—Sire—hear me——"

" You *but* me, man—you *but* me overmuch ! "

" I am at your Grace's feet . . . Sire, if some enemy hath abused your ear with this weird tale, 'twere but due to me to declare who he is ".

Henry turned to Brandon. " Who, Brandon, was it said that my Lord Wolsey was in the castle ? "

" One Sidney Boleyn, Sire ".

" A brother of the Lady Anne ? " queried Wolsey.

" Yes, my lord "—from Brandon.

" But, Sire ", said Wolsey, " she is my enemy—avowed——"

At this point Knevet ran up, crying : " No sign of the fugitives, Sire ! "

And in an instant Wolsey's acuteness divined that the wit of the scientist must somehow have contrived to rescue his skin, and, if so, then, his, Wolsey's, too : so at once he said : " I believe that your Grace's ears have been abused by the fiction of an impudent girl : and the proof that the part of it which concerns me is false is seen in the fact that the other part also is false ".

" What other part, my lord ? "

" Sire, there were here no fugitives ".

Now Henry's brow went up. " What ! dared she that ? "

Wolsey was tickled. " Sire, the whole was concocted. There were here no fugitives, credit me. I have even now encountered Sir James Broughton, who hath given me this assurance. This Mistress Boleyn, Sire——"

" Ha ! she shall smart for it, then ! . . . My Lord Cardinal, forgive me——"

The fists of King and Priest met in a grip of fresh friendship, the priest smiling from the height of his neck his little superior smile.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN THE FOREST

The virtuous soul pursues a nobler aim,
And life regards but as a fleeting dream. *Gay.*

Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè tale,
Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
Nè fiamma di questo incendio non m'assale. *Dante.*

Calvo was once more free with his "pair of damsels": and, seeking out the deepest secret of the forest, they slept there.

This dark wood, called Broughton Wood, was crowded with rabbits, so the next day Calvo invented a trap, and set it: but when the rabbits of the time, wise in their generation, divined the whole mind of the sage, and squatted in their jungled glooms, content to forego the trap, the beauty complained that it was too much to expect of her; the sage's nose took on the wrinkles of fretfulness; and at three in the afternoon Bessie rose, to go and beg.

Away, then, she went, wending on a way that she knew not through the sunless shades, the storm of the night quieted now to a breeze, all the forest creaking, warbling, squeaking with unseen life, while overhead the ocean of foliage was very good Gileadite, glib at saying the *sh* in "shibboleth".

And, as she wended, sadly meditating, her robe somewhat torn, her little "natte", or plait, reaching no lower than her bodice-neck cut-away, suddenly two hands from behind pressed over her eyes, two lips shot a kiss at her chin, and chuckled a little.

When, on being released immediately, she looked up to see a lank strip of body towering above her, a lean brown face, mournfully she smiled; and, without the least appearance of being startled, said: "By my credit, sir, you

startled me . . ." knowing him at once for the Black Knight ; knowing, too, from rumours, that the Black Knight was Francis of France ; but, as for him, he had no notion that here was the sister of that Beauty which he coveted—had bussed her merely for the reason that she was a girl in the furtive glooms of a wood.

" And why here, and whitheraway, mamsel ? " quoth he.

" I am faring through the forest, sir, to seek some nourishment for me and mine ".

" Little English body . . ." he muttered, contemplating her, smiling, amused with her little way and English demureness.

" And whitheraway you, my lord ? " she asked.

" I ? Why, I seek here—but, come, thou art not angry, I think, that I bussed thy cheek ? "

" Nay, 'twere more than that would anger me, sir, seeing that it was merry and fairly done. But you *seek* someone, my lord ? "

" La, yes. Has it not come to thine ears that a number of cavaliers seek a special gentle demoisel hereabouts ? I, know, am even one of them : and, catching this morning a wind of rumour that she lies concealed within this wood, I, with some comrades, wander here asearch ; la ! and now am I in double dilemma, for neither demoisel nor comrades meet I. Moreover, I have four gashes in my chest, and am faint, mon Dieu ! If, now, I had that little lap to lay my head on pending a ten minutes' space—"

" Why, sir, if you will it so—" turning upon him a gaze of perfect eyes ; and although they met an ogle not quite fair and good, when he said " Here, then ? " she took her seat on a mound in brown obscurity at the foot of an oak hoarily old, close by which a brook roamed broody, humming a music among umbrages that never knew any ray of the sun or of the moon, while he, stretched at his length, blinked up into leafage which the breezes continuously tickled into an irritancy like tittering ; and now, his head raised there on her lap, it was as when once two babes, exposed in a wood, were found by a wolf ; and there were a

thousand chances to one that she would devour them ; but that one chance, which does exist in the Divine eccentricity of Nature's vein, strained and triumphed: she suckled them.

" Thou hast met with none of my friends, I take it ? " he said after a minute.

" Not I, sir ".

" Of the girl which I search for hast heard tell in thy village ? "

" I have heard tell of her, my lord ".

" How knowest thou I am milord ? "

" Why, your good and gracious way with a poor maiden bewrayeth you gentle, sir ".

He kissed her hand. " Thinkest thou I would harm thee? "

" Not you, my lord ! "

" Faith, then, I would not ".

" Why, I know it ".

" But as to this maiden—canst give me no guidance ? For I would wager she is within this wood ".

" If I could, my lord, think you I *would* ? "

" La ! and wherefore not ? " raising in astonishment his hairy head, all about which the breezes toyed.

" Because, sir, meseems you seek her not for her good ".

" But precisely for her good I seek her ! 'twere my will to lavish about her all the pleasures of life, by Criscross ".

" For how long, my lord ? "

" Why, so long as her life ".

" But life is not long, my lord. You can give no pleasures in the grave ".

" Who talks of graves, mamsel ? "—again raising his head to glance at her.

" Why, sir, 'tis naught if I talk of graves, since graves are all round us, and a life is just like last Summer, which lasted not long, and is evanished now and buried away, no man any more remembering its breaths and hours ".

" *Mortbleue !* 'tis true, girl. La—true. Yet while that Summer lasted 'twere well, meseems, that it shone merry and cheery ".

" So I hold, too, sir : and fain am I, I avowch, of flute and tabouret, and dancing under the moon on the green, and the boonness of good beer, and sweet lover's-whisperings above all, my lord, had I—aye me—but a lover, sir : for though I prate of graves, it were ill to me to die, who am full of life, in good sooth, too much perchance ; but, sir—"

" Well, I hearken : say it through ".

" Sir, the pleasures you would be showering upon that poor wench resemble not truly the good brave shining of a Summer, but more, methinks, flushes of lightning in a sombre sky. Faith, something assures me that she would win a thimbleful, but lose the sea ".

" How lose the sea ? "

" Why, sir, methinks there's that in simple innocence that more comforts the bones than an ale-house hearth at Christmas Eve ; and there's a jig into which the clear heart may break merrier far, by my credit, than galliard or brawl or corantoes ; and a secret *drink* of—oh, no, I can't say it—"

She stopped ; and Francis, curiously moved within him, as she so communed with him, looking up into the oak, lisped musingly : " Say it on—say it on—"

" Why, sir, surely ", said she, " there is that which speaks, and we hear it, though not with the ear : and like a lover it breaths to us, or like a storm it brawls. Oh, faith, to be clear and clean of spirit appeareth a great alchemy and sound ducket-gold in the pouch : for it is then as if one went jaunting on a march in company with the sun and the moon and all the—Oh, my lord, look out ! " ending in an outcry, as out in a protective impulse rushed her hand over the brow of the French King, to be pierced by a bullet which penetrated, and drew blood from him, too. Her instincts having chanced to catch some hint of sound and of a puff of smoke whiffing out of thicket, she had acted with the instancy of instinct ; nor with less instancy was the King up, and with flashing falchion was away like a wind in chase.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT ORMOND HALL

Distinguish all the floods that are
Mixed in that watery theatre. . . . *Herrick.*

That missile had been aimed by a retainer of Ormond Hall, of whom three, with Anne, were ransacking the forest for Laura, when Anne through thicket had beheld Bessie, and the head of Francis pillowed on Bessie's lap ! whereat, seized with fear, concluding now that Bessie had compounded with the French King—that the beauty was in Francis' hands—she had doomed him without hesitation ; and " shoot me that man ! " she had whispered to a liveryman.

At the crash Francis had dashed off to track the assassin : but pursuit in such a wood was hopeless ; and when nobody was to be found he set out to discover the oak where he had left Bessie ; but, on his coming to one which he took to be the same, no Bessie was there ; and, full of a sense of loss, he had now the fancy that perhaps he had been bespoken by some affable angel in homely disguise, resting here awhile in the shade on her high wayfaring between sphere and sphere. When, on touching his forehead, he saw his hand red from a flesh-wound, and knew that the hand which had saved him must be wounded, too, compunction took him, and he ran to and fro, looking for her.

But Bessie, meantime, had gone off upon her errand—northward by chance—tracked by Anne, who had the hope that Bessie was now going toward Laura ; or, since half a mile northward lay Ormond Hall, this other hope leapt in Anne's mind : " If, now, she be going to the Hall for food, and I hold her safe there under lock and key ! "

nor was there any likelihood that Bess should descry her tracker, the anguish of the gash in her hand so occupied her ; anon she held it aloft, shaking it cherishingly as it ached, the gash being now bound round with a rag from her undergown.

Presently, a thickness of wood making her change her direction, she continued in the new course ; but Anne was now possessed with the idea of having her at the Hall, feeling sure now that she was not making toward Laura, being now too near the wood's edge, so that she was walking *from* Laura ; and, to reach Laura, all that was necessary was to seek in the opposite direction : for it did not now seem that Francis—as yet—had Laura, since Bessie had left the tree without him. But Anne's first tactical task was the securing of Bessie, if that could be worked without scaring her—Anne, apart from tactics, having at present a sinner's detestation of this puritan sister of the beauty, and simply to bring her bale was pleasant : so when she changed her direction away from Ormond Hall, Anne presently spread over her face a veil of gold gauze, quickly caught up the pilgrim, passed her a little—on a greensward between tree-trunks, deep-gloomed and cool, the afternoon so far advanced toward twilight, that here it seemed like night. Bessie, as the lady passed by her, drew aside respectfully ; and presently Anne turned her head to say : " Lost thy way, girl ? "

Now, for the first time, Bessie heard that voice's strong contralto.

" No, mistress, not that wholly ; but——"

" What seekest ? "

" Why, a hamlet, or a hall——"

" Thou goest hardly right, then. Art a stranger here ? What is thy errand ? "

" Truth to tell, I go to beg a morsel of food——"

" Why, poor lost soul, follow me straight ! Not six minutes hence is Redmond Castle, where thou shalt be regaled, I undertake ! "—walking onward now, Bessie

following with laggard steps : and if her guardian angel warned her to halt, she was hardly aware, the angels talk so soft.

For not until Anne issued from the forest's shadow did Bessie see her well ; whereat at once something—a memory, an instinct—troubled her ; but indefinitely : and famine pressed ; and yonder was the mansion, a square mass, low and grey, having a great number of windows, ablaze now with sunset, standing lonely in the middle of lawn-lands, and all round it forest.

Yet four hundred feet and Anne, now at the house-front, which looked east, beckoned ; Bess came to the broad frontage-steps, but there halted.

" Come ", said Anne busily.

" Shall I not make to the back, mistress ? " asked Bess, wondering.

" No, this way. Come ".

" My mother . . ." muttered Bess.

But she followed through an antlered and hatchmented ante-chamber, through a salon, up a " staircase ", along a corridor, to a room : at the door of this Bessie stopped, her nostrils stirring.

" Come ", said Anne—a long room, containing three windows in the house-front, two in a side, its furnishing heavy—tapestry, ebon chairs, a table for shovel-board, a Spanish foot-cloth of needle-work bound in buckram, a massive " beaufet ", Venice mirrors in silver filigree, a gallery of bellied balusters aloft ; and a mass of Court-letters on an escritoire, and of embroidery on a settee, proved it a room of Anne's.

When Bessie entered, Anne promptly locked the door ; then, propping her back upon a clock, tossed up her veil, and with a mocking underlook dwelt upon Bess.

Now Bessie recognised her, and gave out a cry—in which was not terror alone but redness and rage, too.

" Why, lady "—with stirring nostrils—" what is your will of me ? "

" Oh, Innocence ! " mocked Anne, " village *naiveté* embodied, I swear ! Canst not guess ? "

" Why, lady, not I ! "

" Yet thou knowest me, I see. I followed thee once—thou fled'st me. Now—is it not so ?—I have thee, Bess ".

" ' Have ' . . . By what right have you me, lady ? "

" So thou hast a malapert lip to demand, I see, and art not all village *naiveté*, after all ! The head of Francis of France on the lap of a village-lass in a forest is symbol of far march in the paths of *naiveté*, for that matter. Oh, by the Rood, thou frisky Bess ! "

At this Bessie's blanched face flashed into peony ; then : " Prithee—let me hence "—faltering, crushed with shame —" oh, your thoughts—your tongue——"

" Was it not, then, frisky, Bess ? Poor Francis is so frail —and hath, 'tis said, a tooth for both of two sisters——"

" Lady, may I not fare hence ? "

" Why, nay, Bess ".

" Now, may God me hold from doing you hurt with my hands, lady ! " exclaimed Bessie Ford, holding backward both her fists.

" I hope He even will, girl, for your sake : for this, you must know, is no ' Redmond Castle ', as I told you, but Ormond Hall, my father's house ".

" I hear you, lady ; yea, in good sooth, you have all the strength on your part. But 'tis therefore that you should the less wrong me, who, faith, am a poor creature, sore beset, God wot, come here to beg of your ladyship some crumbs of bread. Wherefore keep and crush and—madden me ? What part hath a lady such as you in my woeful estate ? Prithee, let me hence ! Prithee, prithee ! Who, lady, are you ? "

And now Anne, bluff frankness itself when no motive counselled diplomacy : " Oh, I am the Lady Anne Boleyn. Now can'st see what I need with thee ? "

" Why, lady, nay ! "

" Art dull, then. Henry of England, thou seest, was hot

to make me his queen this day month agone, but, being the mumping gull he is, he hath flung me over to run agape after thy goose sister, good Bess——"

"My sister! What have you with my sister, lady?"

"Thy sister I seek, that I may have her in my hands, that I may give her into the hands of Henry, that Henry may give into my hands the Kingdom of England, that—so on, in the manner of the house that Jack built, chaste Bess".

"Why, woman, you are black with sin!"

"And would you know precisely why I hold you *now*, chaste Bess? Wait—I will even show you!"

Whereat, soaring in her soaring way to the escritoire by the door, Anne scribbled a few sentences, while Bessie stood with her eyes roaming round about the chamber like a caged life—eyes that finally fell upon the escritoire, and there lighted upon a paper which she instantly recognised: the King's letter to Wolsey, stolen by her from Fitzgerald's cloak.

"There!" said Anne, starting up: "this, Bess, is a note to a young nobleman called Percy; and it tells him: 'Go with armed men, *sans* delay, in a southern direction from Ormond Hall through Broughton Wood, passing round the cress-pool on its northern bank. The girl is there. Go in thy proper person, maugre thy hurts. Francis lurks thereabouts. Anne'".

Now, it happened that this billet pretty accurately described the actual locality of Calvo: and Bessie's knees went weak.

Now they remained some moments motionless, confronted, Bessie's eyes haggard, Anne smiling; till Anne moved toward a bell-rope by the gallery, to summon a bearer of the note: and, that movement breaking the spell of Bessie's terrors, with a snatch she had the note crumpled in her own hand.

That smile of venom faded now from Anne's face, flame was there, and, stepping upon Bessie, she cried aloud:

" That letter wench ! lest I strike you dead "—as down upon Bessie's face fell the smack of her palm with scarlet smart ; and in a moment they were engaged in a struggle for the note, with stumbles, with swayings, in a muteness of effort, save for their breaths which vehemently filled the room, of the two Anne being the bigger-built, but Bessie pretty vigorous and knit, having the vital good sap of England in her bone and fibre ; and so some time they tustled, until Bessie, though tormented with her wound, by a push of both fists sent the other stumbling ; and instantly slipped the note into her own bosom.

" Now you die, you little marmot ! " Anne gasped with a nod at her, as she dashed again to the bell-pull.

But again Bessie was beforehand—flew to the spot, leapt up, and hung her whole weight upon the rope of wool, which dropped in a snake.

And now she ran to the door ; but as, before she could turn the key, Anne's hand was on it, she, in an unexpected jerk, drew the key, and hurled it through a window, which splintered.

Now, if she was a captive, so was Anne : woman to woman they stood there, Anne without help from without now : for, although Bessie's weight had rung the bell in a single clang, that had aroused no one ; and Anne now commenced to cry out : " Hi, Bertha ! Wallis ! Hi ! "

But without delay Bessie, darting upon her, clapped both palms over her mouth, and so cast her backward to a crouch, from which Anne sprang up in a rapture of passion : and in this passion now was half-a-qualm of cowardice.

" Look you, girl—if you dare lay—hands on me— ! " her pants got out.

" Hold your voice, then ! " responded Bessie's pant, " do but lift it and—I tear your skin—I beat—you blue ! "

" Then would you need—your man, Fitzgerald here to aid you—gutter-hen— ! " was Anne's gasp, her strong sense all breaking up now into childish spite and femininities.

Whereat the other in a tone of surprise and transferred

interest, replied : " I know naught of—whom you mean . . . Will your tongue be fastening—upon him also ? "

" Him ! the rottenest profligate, that man, in all England ! "—a feminine arrow shot at random.

" Oh, most like 'tis a lie, like all you say ! " cried Bess with an intolerant bitterness raw as terebinth : " corrupted is your tongue and rotten from its root ! And how if I, since you so madden me, and dare so slander the innocent, make straight hence to the King, and reveal him this your billet, lying here in my bosom ; point to who 'tis writ—most likely your paramour ; and tell of wherefore you would trap my little sister—of all your unwomanly pitilessness—your unhandsome thinkings—your virtueless and ungentle works—and all your shame ! Oh, fie, lewd lady ! Nay, and 'tis what I even *shall* do—yea, verily, by my credit, exposed you *shall* be—— ! "

At a threat so terrible the virago in Anne glared and grinned, and again she stepped, with a shuddering of her arms which opened, upon Bessie ; but paused, dreading her ; and sought with feminine instinct how to kill with the sting of the tongue : " Ha ! ha ! Anne Boleyn exposed by Bessie Ford !—a theme for the playhouse at Southwark, I swear to God, I swear to God ! O cameradoes ! Then surely must I call Mark Bonner to witness against you ! "—words in a high degree hysterical, without special meaning, except in so far as they introduced the name of Bonner in the hope of wounding.

" And what of Mark Bonner now, if you please ? " demands Bessie.

" He ! O, the accepted lover of the sister ! By God, that boy kisses a girl like a turbot gobbling a bait ".

" Who ? 'tis some mistake you make, then . . . "

" A woman mistakes not the man which kisses her, daw ! He has kissed and handed me, that boy—— ! "

Pale-struck now like paper stood Bess : for, if Bonner was false to Laura, what hope remained ? She breathed " Mark Bonner ? "

And Anne : " That boy ! Faith, never was I so actively tackled ! "

" But *what* a wanton— ! " sighed Bessie faintly, turning away her face.

" 'Tis so said. Yet never have I borne in my lap the head of Francis—in a wood ! whose taste, by the Rood, degenerates of late, thou bosomless skelet ! "

And Bess : " Oh, silence, for I spit upon you ! I do loathe you with my soul as a thing unclean and deadly ! Yet, by my credit, I fear you not, for stronger is that better is ; and, as for the letter that lies there, you have no right to it, I trow—"

She had backed, as she spoke, toward the escritoire, and by one quick spin had the King's letter to Wolsey.

Whereat Anne, forgetting every fear, darted to seize it—her last weapon against the Cardinal : but the letter was well in Bessie's breast ; and Anne, on receiving a severe thrust-back at the neck, if she had flamed before, raved now, there where she stood throwing back her throat to heap shriek on shriek, yelling : " help ! help ! help ! ", and, as she yelled, spittles speckled her lip, her dishevelled visage showing like a chaos of sunset flushed.

Now, however, her shouts reached : from some region of the house Sir Thomas came running, as did a dozen retainers ; and still she yelled ; and, as she yelled, Bessie Ford, transported, too, beat and beat upon her upturned face, panting : " Hush—or I beat—you blue ! " And even in that moment of collapse and distraction Anne remembered the dart, the poison of asps ; and she shrieked and sobbed while Bessie beat : " You might guess—whence I got—the letter——"

" Little it tides whence—hold your voice or—I beat—you blue——"

" 'Twas from *him* ; he is wild in love—with me——"

" You said—it before—hush, or I—"

" Not him—not Bonner—Fitzgerald——"

" *Who ?* "

" Fitzgerald——"

" Oh, you liar !—take it !—if he loved a fluff like you—take it !—I'd stab—I'd stab him to—the heart ! "

" He loves—me mad ! "

" Lie—take it——"

" 'Twas he gave—me the letter—when you were—expecting it ! "

Now Bessie swerved backward, stabbed, conquered, with one sob : for the falsehood was plausible that that idol which she shyly cherished in the shrine of her breast was always unfriendly to its cherisher. But when the door was shaken without, with shouts, with shoulders pushing, she, recovering herself, rushed to a window to leap—twenty-five feet. However, as she put out her shoulders, Anne's hands were upon them, dragging her back ; and now again like cat-o-' mountain they began to struggle, with ragged gowns, their womanhood naked to its foundations, ugly, until Anne got a glimpse of two retainers outside, who had run round to see what they could see : so, letting go Bessie now, she drove her head out of the window to shout : " Go to Fenley—a wounded man there—tell him—— ! " Bessie, however, looking out, too, was shouting down a passionate monotone, drowning Anne's shouting, anon belabouring Anne's face, so that the two retainers could not hear ; the other retainers behind were raining blows upon the door, meantime, with truncheons and quarter-staffs, although of this neither of the combatants were in the least conscious.

At last Anne, in a feint, ran from the window to the middle of the apartment, thence, with a dart, to a farther window ; and ere Bessie could reach her had shrieked down half her message, screaming the rest through Bessie's shouting, both bending recklessly down out of window with the concentration of the pearl-diver's rage, who spies the pearl nigh, and he is stifling for breath, yet he will earn it or burst.

When the men at last nodded up, Anne howled down " *Heard ?* "—her gullet now hoarse, her mouth bloated out

and blubber, glossy with blood and blood-whey as with glair of egg-white ; and, when they again nodded " Yes ", " Then, go ! " she called, and they were off.

The messengers being now on their fatal way, Bessie, as when the wolf is in steep career for a mother's babe, dashed, frantic now, to another window. Anne was again at her ; and though Bessie now had the vigour of three, the struggle gasped some three minutes, while another window shivered, to shower upon the frontage-steps—both the girls, meantime, observing three horsemen cantering toward the Hall across the lawn, but observing them mistily like things on some other earth : for to her last conscious pant Anne battled, but then sighed, shut her eyes, collapsed upon the carpet a sluttish bundle, while Bessie stood on a window-sill, hesitated, leapt.

Her toes touched ground as bouncingly as a ball, her fall broken by two arms in which she was caught—the arms of Garrett Oge Fitzgerald, who, with his two friends, in trying to find an inn, had spied the Hall, had ridden thither for a meal—such being the hospitable freedom of the period ; and Fitz, in front of the other two, on seeing a woman hesitating on a window-sill, had galloped, had leapt from his horse, and had caught her with such yielding power, that her feet touched ground as buoyantly as a ball.

And for an instant he stared at her face—she at his—until she, still envenomed, her face all marred and red, his name still ringing in her memory in the gasps of Anne, dashed him from her with the passion of a jealous girl, hissing at him "*Beast !* let me *go* !—filthy, heartless, cruel, herd—— ! "

One might have knocked down Fitzgerald with a feather, so catlike was her attack ; and she had run yards before he started in chase, calling " Why, good God, hold, Bess ! Why, 'tis I—— ! "

Anguished at the chance of again, this time, losing her —for the wood was hardly sixty yards away—distracted at the terror of it, he hesitated betwixt persisting on foot and

darting back for his animal, then darted back, calling to Mac and Bonner " After ! After ! ". But they, still a little distance away, had realised not at all what was falling out ; and by the time Fitzgerald reached his steed, and was on it, Bessie was but ninety feet from the forest ; whereupon the friends started together in stretched chase, Mac and Bonner being horsed from the plenty left riderless from the castle-siege ; but, even as they started, Fitz perceived that the hunt was hopeless now ; also that another form, besides Bessie's, was running before him, whence sprung he could not divine—a wight flying ardently after her, and so near upon her, that Fitz feared to fire at him.

And from this runner, certainly, Bessie could not escape : for he flew with the fleetest feet, lingering only an instant, as the girl disappeared within the wood, to turn and send a bullet at the riders, crying at the same time to Bessie in his high falsetto : " Stay, mamie !—I am Sidney Boleyn ! "

He, on hearing the commotion in his half-sister's withdrawing-room, had feared mischief for the fugitives, had run to spy at the front window ; and, arriving at the hall-door at the moment when Bessie leapt, had started in pursuit behind Fitz—with very definite motive, for since the seer's flight from the castle he had hired a cottage nigh to the village of Maddox, had crammed it with a stock of provisions, and then had waited, alert for the first hint of the flyers' place of hiding.

So when he now clapped his hand on Bessie's back, Bessie led him to the thicket where Calvo and Laura waited; and the three fared cautiously through the forest, following the lead of Sidney, as the shades of evening fell.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FRANCIS AND BESSIE

Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon *Thy* face. *Wordsworth.*

Meanwhile, the two messengers of Anne were speeding to Fenley, in one of whose two inns Percy had lain burning from a hip-wound, though at noon that day, when delirium came on, he had been taken by his men in one of those horse-litters called " charres " to the city of Alresford, in which a mediciner lived.

Soon after which Alvarada, Sir John Perrott, and their two, had come to this inn, Alvarada's handsome face now of the colour of coffee-and-milk, his hurts so serious, that immediately he dropped asleep on the inn-parlour bench ; and near six the French King returned to the other of the two inns, which he had left that noon to go asearch in the wood, he having as yet met none of his chevaliers who had set out with him, and had scattered in the wood ; nor had any of them yet come back to the inn, from a window of which his ensign stuck motionless over a slushy street, where ducks paraded ; and back of the hamlet lay his camp. On entering the inn, he bathed the blood from his brow ; then, being faint, threw his lean frame on a settee, to dream a drowsy memory of that fugitive angel of the wood who had given him news of good and ill.

Now, the two messengers sent to a " wounded man at Fenley ", as Anne in her urgency had described Percy, arrived to find at the porch of Alvarada's inn an old grandam sitting in gammer's coif, knitting : as the sun without rest nor haste went down, so without rest nor haste she knitted.

And " Gammer ", said one of the men, " is it that a wounded man lies in this inn ? "

" Why, yea ", said she, nor ceased to knit, " and at The Wheatsheaf yonder also lies a wounded man ".

In her proneness to speech lay perplexity ; and " Which of the two will it be, coz ? " asked one of the men.

The other replied : " Faith, that I wot not."

But the first, being profound, said : " Fail we cannot, an we give to *both* the message ".

And this, as soon as uttered, seemed good. So one sped down to The Wheatsheaf, while one entered The Lymington Pot.

So Francis was quickly up and ahorse, and fifteen minutes afterwards Alvarada, more grievously carved, started out with his three, each having concealed his astonishment at receiving the message, guessing a mistake sent direct from God.

The description was explicit : " South from Ormond Hall . . . " : so the first business was to go to Ormond Hall, and steer thence. Now, on the road from Fenley to Ormond Hall is a footpath going north to Maddox village, where Sidney had got the cottage for Calvo : and so it was that, as Francis galloped toward Ormond Hall, he observed four persons before him on the road, their backs toward him—Sidney now leading the three toward the Maddox footpath.

These, hearing the hoofs, looked in terror backward : and at once Francis knew the beauty's face ; moreover, slung on Sidney's shoulder was the sack of Calvo, one of the clues to the fugitives.

Escape now was not for the beauty—unless the four scattered, and Francis in the gloaming should pursue the wrong girl—for all around was open pasture-land, without hiding-place.

So Flying Sidney wildly whispered : " 'Tis the Black Knight ! Let's fly divers ways——"

On came the impending hoofs : and they flew, Calvo to

the right from the road, Laura straight onward, to make the pursuer think that she was Bess, Bess and Sidney to the left, but haltingly she, with her head always turned to watch the horseman.

But Francis was not deceived, keeping his onward course after Laura, and was a hundred yards from his prize—was ninety—when Bess stopped her halting flight, turned, ran with desperate pelt—back toward the road, which she reached at a moment when the horse was hardly fifteen yards from her ; and there in the middle she stood, with stretched arms, facing the charger.

Astounded at which audacity, Francis, seeing that she must be trampled, passionately shouted " *Vide ! Vide !* "—unconsciously in French.

One second before he was upon her, he recognised her—the girl of the forest, whose words had infected him with feelings of weird sweetness : and, grinning, with his whole vigour he tore, he tugged, he reined : whereat the steed reared—immediately above the head of Bessie ; but, as it rose, she rose gnashing with it, wielded aloft by the wrenching snatch of the head-harness, to which she clung by one arm ; and back with it she was swung to her back, white and wincing, but alive.

And King Francis' eyes were so given up to her, that there was no chance that he should catch sight of the flashing thing that was winging, as a swift wings, for his side—a dagger hurled with good aim by Flying Sidney—Francis' armour being nothing but a shirt of ring-mail.

And again that already gashed palm of Bessie was slashed, as she sprang a little with lifted arm, and touched the dagger as it flashed by : upon which the weapon, deflected, struck the flank of the charger, which started, with twitching ribs.

Seeing which, bending low to her with a solemn gaze, Francis said : " *Again ?* "

" The second time, my lord ! " quoth she, holding up two fingers, with a nod at him.

" Criscross ! 'tis ableed—prithee——" down he leapt in a flurry, and was on a knee before her, bending over the hand, fondling it, kissing it, with " Little hand . . . Little hand . . . "

And she : " Nay, 'tis not so much as that, my lord. By my credit, I've been athwart worse than that ".

He whipped out a square of silk from a portmantle at his saddle-bow, bound it about her hand, saying : " Little hand !—wilt come with me to the land of France ? Then shalt thou demurely instruct me every day how highly to live ' in company ', la ! ' with the sun and the—— ' "

" But the girl is running away all the time, my lord ", said Bessie with bold self-confidence, and confidence in him.

" Girl ? " he repeated absently.

" Laura Ford, my lord."

Up he sprang.

" La, by Criscross, I had forgotten her ! Mamie, and thy motive for arresting me thus boldly in this my pursuit ? "

" She is my sister, my good lord ".

Now Francis smote hands, and drew back a step, gazing at her a full minute. When he spoke he said : " Now, may every blessed saint forgive me ! "

Bessie smiled. " Why, no, my lord, you take it too lourdly ".

" 'Tis *thou* art the sister ? "

" Yea, my lord, she shall tell it you herself, if you will ".

" Gentle girl ! High heart ! I pledge thee, on the honour of a knight, that I knew not what I did ".

Now Bessie lifted up her voice, calling " Laura ! ", beckoning, her insight into men having detected that trust in Francis touched the best in him, enriched his chivalry ; but Calvo, from the grass-land, heard her call with angry amazement ; while Laura, wondering, faltering, came ; Francis at the same time standing with one raised arm, a brow humbly bowed, dumbly vowing that no man, he living, should snatch from this lass her sister, not

himself, not Henry : and, as he swore, Laura, all breathless breasts, with an underlook of coquetry, was before him.

Again he started—for she was fair ; shaded his eyes with his palm, pretending to be blinded, bowing profoundly, while Bess smiled.

But his mood was for the moment changed, he enraptured now, not with Laura but with Bess, catching now a glimpse of the lineaments of a grace more ravishing, and a charm more witching, than the winningness of lily or lip.

And he lisped, bowing : " My adoration, mamsels. Paris, the Greek, gave his apple to Venus : his modern namesake, the city, proffers in the person of me, its King, asylum to Minerva. Will you sail with me ?—wilt *thou* ? "

" Why, my good lord, this were too gracious of you ! " cried Bessie Ford.

" Oh, gracious of *you*, if you accord it. Would'st trust the sister to a God-forgotten rogue like Francis of France ? I am a King, wot you ? Yet, if thou so honourest me, prouder were I than of sceptre and diadem. And here in your England is no escape for you, be sure ! Henry . . . la ! Wilt sail with me ? Say ! "

" Why, my good lord ", answered Bessie, who searched into his eyes, and thought she saw honour, " there is nought that Master Calvo, and myself also, could more desire——"

" Calvo ! " cried Francis, " is *he*—— ? "

But now he was surprised by the sound of hoofs—Alvarada, Sir John Perrott, and two Queen's-men, coming, pelting—and, from afar recognising Alvarada, " La ! " he cried, " here come some of your seekers, with which I must cross sword : one, two, la—four ! And since one-against-four hath end uncertain, 'twere best you take to running, mamsels ! But stay—where meet we ? "

" Oh, sir, I know not—pray, have a care ! " cried Bess : " are you not faint with wounds—— ? "

" La ! not too faint to pick a cuirass or two, Minerva, I warrant thee ! Where meet we, say ! Whither now away ? "

Os

"We go to Maddox . . . See, they pelt near, my lord—— !"

"I see, I see: I keep one constant eye upon them. Maddox? What place or house?"

"'Tis a house, sir; but I know not the name."

"Know not the name. Well, I will tell you where—yes, I see they come, I see—Maddox. Now, in two days my vessel were ready to sail, my camp to pack; this, then, being Thursday, I meet you Saturday eve at compline—at compline. Fear not, I see—through the corner of mine eye: let them come on! North of Maddox is a wood with a cascade; near the cascade a road; from the road there goes an old stone wall; on still, a pool lies; and beyond the pool a shed. In that shed o' Saturday, at compline, I meet you for a start coastward. 'Tis agreed?"

"Why, yea, my lord! Look out!"

"Now away!"—with drawn blade he cantered to meet the four; and as they met, Bessie, running away, was looking backward, to see him do battle for her.

In reality the battle was but one to three, for Sir John, wounded by Macdonald, had his sword-arm slung: and during a minute's space the King's blade plied with that light nimbleness and Achillean rage which characterised him; a necessary rage: for, though Alvarada, too, could hardly fight, he contrived to inflict upon Francis' back a hack through ring-mail at an instant when Francis was busy with the two Queen's-men: of these, however, one at once dropped, pierced through the heart; and a moment afterwards Alvarada was vomiting gore on the grass, dug to the lung. The remaining Queen's-man then took to his heels, but Francis, overtaking him, stabbed his animal in the groin, and, disdainfully disregarding the man, went at a grave walk in the gathering dark toward Fenley, so faint, that anon his forehead fell to rest on his horse's mane.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DEVIL AT MADDOX

The rills of pleasure never run sincere :
Earth hath no unpolluted spring. *Watts.*

In the territory of Istakhar there is a kind of apple, half of which is sweet, and half sour. *Ebn Haukal.*

After the fight Sir John Perrott contrived, with the help of the remaining Queen's-man, to recapture Alvarada's animal, and place on its back his comrade now severely wounded—though it appears that in martial ages, when wounds were a commonplace, the body received them with less *abandon* and despair—a way of Nature—" adaptation " ; and " Whither now, Count ? " asked Sir John.

" On to Maddox ", answered the Spaniard, who had seen the seer and his damsels take that way : for it was to a house embowered in the mountain-side above Maddox that Sidney Boleyn, by a round-about path, now conducted them, on the understanding that there in isolation they should remain, never to venture from the door : this Maddox being one of the loveliest of embowered nooks south of the foot of a wooded mountain-side, out of whose mournful plume-waving looks an old wind-mill, a ruined old water-mill, the froths of a prolonged waterfall dropping with song from point to point, a manse glancing out, on the summit-crags grey castle-turrets like sentry-guards—all like some corner in Granada ; and, in front of the hamlet, an angry stream, the Winney, running east-and-west between green banks of rock all moss, within the nooks of which women wash clothes aloof in cosy solitudes.

There, then, they supped that night ; and, as they ate,

discussing the offer of Francis, asked Calvo : " Dost trust that chuff ? "

" By my credit, Master Calvo, I do ", answered Bess.

" Ah, I know him better than thou. Fair enow, doubtless, he means to-day—but next month, next year ? Yet perhaps thou art right—perhaps. There is good in some of them "—he quaffed good malvoisy.

" Why, Master Calvo, is not this proffer of the King like sudden light in a dark place ? and the plain evidence of the hand of God ? "

" Well, well, have it your own way "—he quaffed again.

Calvo was not enthusiastic, on his own score, as to Francis' offer, although, for Bessie, he could not but see that it was a very great thing, and the one way. As a matter of fact, his motives were at present more or less corrupted by the proffers of Wolsey, and shot with selfishness. For one thing, he wished to maintain in the brain of Francis the superstition that Mauro Calvo had really proclaimed Laura to him by means of star-gazing : to be beheld in the company of Laura would be utterly to dispel such a notion —and the sage, vain, was touched with charlatanism. Moreover, if he could live in England under Wolsey, he preferred England : for France he had tried, protected by Francis, and yet had run from the strong Church, which never liked the wise, the civil arm of Wolsey being far stronger than the French King's. So he preferred England—wanted peace to do a thing.

But, on the whole, he fell in with the offer of Francis, which was present and tangible ; and, drinking Sidney's malvoisy, he patted Bess on the head, here and now tasting happiness—in a house, unmolested ; and, scarcely allowing himself time to devour his supper, he hurried out to a bowered pantry-portico at the house-back, and, spreading the contents of his bag on a table there, began to plan, to do.

The next morning he was up almost as soon as Bessie, and set to business, as busy as she, who went to and fro with her bandaged hand preparing their nooning ; while

Laura, lying late abed, well-fed now and content, beheld the light of day and a mavis that sang at her lattice : whereupon " O, 'tis minion ! " she grinned, and went to the window, where the gaiety and alertness of the day, of the world of leafage, agreed well with her bent, each bird shrieking for glee, the tickled trees, everything wantoning in revel, a wedding-morning smell and novelty, all the sumptuous pomp of Summer : so she threw on her clothes ; looked with a musing underlook into a mirror, and stole on tiptoe out of the room.

For her whims were headlong, and, having a whim, she was a mere deaf wish : so now, knowing that Bess was busy, aware that it was forbidden, she went out.

Her footsteps led her through the multitudinous wood toward the music that the cascade made, where she saw that, by hopping on rocks in a frothing pool, she could walk into a cavern at the back of the fall of water. And this she did.

Now, sitting on a rock in the cavern was a man, who sprang up and said " Pardon " ; adding to himself : " This should be she ".

It was Alvarada : and, though not sure, he believed it scarcely probable that within the breadth of Britain two beings so passionately fair could breathe, and heave the breast.

" I will—leave you ", said he, bowing.

And Laura, who had an eye for chevalier bowing, was charmed.

" Why, nay ", she said, " it is rather I who am in fault . . ."

" Yet, if you go, I shall be desolated "—he bowed.

" Why, then, sir, I will stay, since you so speak . . ."

Whereupon Alvarada, who could hardly stand, and had crawled abroad in order to balm his smarts with morning-oxygen, sat anew in moss ; while she, too, propped herself upon a slope that was a mosaic of hyacinths and violets, in front of them being the cascade, robed like a bride in frothy

fripperies, down-rushing with a shouting of whisperings, showering that same sound which the trees breathed (mysterious *sh* of Nature's shibboleth), the spirit of its spray impregnating all the grotto, watering to a greenery as gaudy as that glamour of the cheetah's glances both shuddering maidenhair and plush of moss, poppy-bloodshed, and lushness of many an embowering shrub and bright-eyed flower ; and when the Spaniard heaved a sigh of faintness half-real, half-feigned, Laura, who was happy here, cried " Sir ! you are sick ".

" 'Tis nothing, lady ", he groaned : " I—have been attacked by brigands : if you will but lend me your hand . . ."

His nose was the picture of hers ; his eyes coal-black ; his coffee-colour only made him handsomer : so when the girl gave him her hand, the thought occurred to him that he might have Laura Ford, if this was truly Laura, without the use of force : and, since he had little force at hand, against force he decided.

He told her of Spain, of Europe ; recounted adventures, the dress of ladies, the things of Courts. After half an hour she allowed him to kiss her.

" Oh, I must go now ", she said agitated.

" To-morrow morning here, then ? "

" Our Saviour ! I cannot ! I have a sister ! "

Now Alvarada was certain.

" But you dwell—where ? "

" Down yonder in a house apart ".

" That yonder whose thatch appears ? "

" No, not that : it cannot be seen, but it is not far from that, to the left ".

" I shall come and see you this very night ! "

" Our Saviour ! you must not ! Nay, you could not ! You forget my sister ! "

" Fear nothing : she will sleep. I will come—can I help it ? Oh, I will come ! You, awake, will hear me mouth a recorder, and show your face, lady, your divine countenance,

dearest girl ! "—a threat of passion which filled her with both horror and pleasure ; and, holding herself from him, she kissed him bent, and ran, to re-enter the cottage stealthily.

And at eleven that night sounded the fine flute's wooing in a bowery wild at the house-back, bridal with flowering vetch and fairy jasmine : so, trembling lest Bessie or the seer should hear, she got her body softly from her bed, tossed about her an outer gown, bound her brows picturesquely with a wrap, and ran to a window, where, though no moon shone, her eyes could divine his stretched hands of adoration, his serenader-pose.

" Will you come ? " he whispered up.

" Sh-h-h ! "

" Oh, come ! "—with unnecessary loudness : and now she was in his power.

So, putting up a confidential hand, bidding wait, she turned inward, arranged her dress, crept down, opened a little lattice-door robed in honeysuckle and white briony —the door of the pantry-portico appropriated by Calvo ; and admitted him.

They were a great while there, her hand grasped in Alvarada's, he murmuring continually, talking this time earnestly, she listening with her divine head bent, her face draped with hair, while he made large promises, châteaux, parishes, and, last of all, marriage, though he was married. He then asked her if she would run with him.

She made the same extraordinary reply which she had once made to Fitzgerald : " Only by force could I be won, sir "—which meant that she wished, but was afraid. And Alvarada understood ; stood up to go.

But in standing, in placing his left hand on the table to raise himself, he not being well, that hand sank into a buttery mass that Calvo had there ; moreover, when he went out, noticing afresh the slushy sensation, he raised the hand to his face to smell it ; and the hand touched the face.

Now, it was necessary, in order to reach his inn, to pass

through the village, long since fast asleep, though the priest, accompanied by the sexton, was precisely then wending homeward, bearing the elements of the Holy Supper from a dying bed : and they two saw Alvarada's face—his face and his left hand alone.

For that face and hand shone : also, the luminosity of the phosphoric butter with which he had touched his nostrils affected his breath, too, which came raying from him in two hazes of whitish fire.

Whereat the priest struck a cross, the sexton a cross. And there was a to-do in Maddox that very night : for even as Alvarada slipped unperceived into his inn and his bed, the belfry-bell was bleating alarum, and Maddox sprang perturbed from sleep, to speed to the church, where the priest, preaching with fainting breaths that the very devil had been spied in the village that night, sprinkled all his fold with holy water.

And with amazing rage and rapidity that thing spread, from village to village, through Hampshire, like a fire : Satan had been authentically beheld at Maddox.

The very next day Henry heard it, for the affair, like the air, was everywhere ; Anne Boleyn heard it ; Fitzgerald, Du Ballay's party, Percy's party—all heard it : and all had the thought that with such a phenomenon the alchymist must in some way be connected ; that Calvo, undoubtedly, must be in or about Maddox ; and upon Maddox with all despatch they all started to march.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ABANDONMENT

Friend after friend departs. . . .

Montgomery.

It was on Friday night that Laura Ford said to Alvarada : " Only by force can I be won, sir " ; it was on Saturday eve, at nine—the then hour of compline—that the three flyers were to meet King Francis in " the hut " to fare under his wing to French land . . .

The Saturday was spent by Alvarada's Queen's-man in riding five leagues to get a pillion, which, as darkness gathered, was affixed to the haunches of the Spaniard's horse ; and it was spent by Anne Boleyn in prowling about the boweries of the mountain-face, peering as evilly as when the Enemy peeped round Eden, all the parties of search, except Percy's, being now round about Maddox : some tents of Henry lying among hillocks on the other (south) side of the stream, Wolsey being now with his King ; while Du Ballay's party, shunning attack from stronger ones, was in the prior's-solar and guesten-hall of a Carmelite friary not far on the yon side of the mountain ; near the friary was a hamlet, in which were Fitzgerald, Macdonald and Bonner ; and all were full of search, starting alert at clues and rumours which were untrue.

But it was not the kind of night suitable for quests and clues : almost as the sun set it was dark ; a storm mouthed ; showers dashed down in spasms like passions of tears, and nearly ceased, and dashed afresh ; and the stream, which had through the day been swollen, rolled now higher, to roar a torrent of solitary oratory in the night, its billows almost splashing the two plank-bridges that spanned it at Maddox.

At eight Alvarada, his horse hidden in a thicket at the cottage-back, blew two long soft flute-notes, which only a listening ear would catch : on which the beauty flew to her lattice—Bessie then giving her finishing cares to their evening meal ; and " 'Tis useless—I must not come, sir ! " she whispered down.

But Alvarada had no time to waste in words. " Dearest girl ", he said, " haste, I beg ! The horse waits yonder—prithee ! else must I enter the house " ; and Laura, regarding the argument of force as final, whispered down : " Then, you must wait yet awhile . . ."

She had spent the day in writing notes to Bessie ; as :

> " Dear Bessie,—I am gone off with a Spanish nobleman, which is very rich, with five castles, and menials. He will marry me. I will be sending thee a collar of balasses like the King wore. Thy dearest sister, Laura Ford ".

And this, after a while, she had torn up, to write :

> " My Dear Sister Bess,—I hope thou wilt not be angry with me, for I have gone off with a mighty great Spanish nobleman, which has seven castles, and menials. He will marry me. Thou knowest I love thee, Bessie, but it was too much to expect of me at the end of the tale. If ever thou seest Mark Bonner, tell him I love him until death. I will be sending thee some collars of balasses like the King wore, and some armlets pounced with diamonds and sapphires. Thy loving sister, Laura Ford ".

This, too, she had torn up, and written others.

On turning now inward from her lover, she heard the summons of Bessie below, and spurted down to the others at table, where the sage, as he ate in shirt-sleeves of Holland-linen, propped an elbow on the table, lost in pondering.

" Well, is all ready for the meeting in the wood ? " he presently said.

Bess said " Yes ".

" And how feelest thou, girl, at this prospect of embarking for a foreign land ? "

" In good sooth, sir, I feel bold and spree, for the good hand of God has led me, and will lead ".

" See what you have brought upon your sister, you with the face ", said Calvo, with a fillip at Laura's hand.

That face of Laura was sallow. She half rose, and sat again, then, after a minute, rose again, and murmured thinly through a throat which choked : " I will return . . .", Bessie looking after her, as she passed out into the latticed pantry-portico, supposing anything but the truth . . .

Within a minute Laura was on the pillion of Alvarada, having dropped her last scribble to Bessie upon Calvo's table ; and after a walk the horse started into galloping, making for the spot where, higher up the mountain-side, Sir John Perrott and a Queen's-man awaited the Spaniard.

Then five minutes, ten, went by, while Bessie ten times cast her eyes toward the door. Laura did not come ; but, instead, a man dashed in, wrapped in a drenched riding-cloak which hooded a white and elfin face—Flying Sidney ; and he broke out : " My master, great and momently is your peril ! Know you that your pursuers are crowded round you ? also Mistress Anne—woe's me that I could not come afore——"

" Know they where I am ? " asked Calvo.

" They divine that you are at Maddox, since the priest saw yester-night the devil ".

" But *I* am not the devil, lad ".

" Nay, but a being was seen breathing mist like Milky-way——"

" That must have been phosphorus ".

" And something so they all have guessed, saying—Have you not been abroad from the cottage, Master ? "

" Not I. But stay—some muddlement I did remark this morning in my mug of amalgam——"

" Then, hath one entered the house ! "

" Nay, lad, none ".

" So I hold, sir ! Pray haste you now to the shed where you have rendezvous with the Black Knight, or all were yet lost ! Not a house on the mountain-side but will be spied. My half-sister, Anne——"

" Bessie, come ! " said Calvo with promptitude ; " we set out this moment. Call the sis, call the sis. Why, lass, what hast thou ? "

With a deathly face Bessie stood in the doorway, holding in one hand a lamp, in the other a note : for, instigated by growing unrest she had peered into the pantry, seen the paper on the table ; and, although she could not read, yet, knowing the look of Laura's writing, her boding soul divined some horror.

Without saying anything, she handed the note to Calvo, to stand bolt then, with a stern dead countenance, as he slowly read the words aloud ; and when he had finished she tossed her body sideward upon the bench, let her head with its little up-sticking plait drop upon her forearms over the table, and wept there without one sound, her mouth stretched wretchedly back like rubber in the strain and tension of her self-pity. Calvo, meantime, was stamping up and down in a passion ; nor for the poor Bess in that hour had he any mercy, putting the burden of the iniquity equally on her little shoulders ; and said he, washing his hands of her : " Well, I have done now—I have done. Enow have I had of you both, and more than enow, and this is the last of all. You seem to ignore, both of you, that you are utter unknowns to me ; that all I have done and suffered for you I have done in doddering and dotage . . . Sidney ! get that bag on your back ! . . . So this is the meaning of the devil in Maddox ! that marmot, your sister, hath e'en tempted a man hither, and he hath dared to meddle with my physics ! And you see the result ? Your persecutors surround you anew : this time, most like, without postponement—I hope so. Art proud of thy Laura, now, eh ? Art proud of the slubberdegullion ? I told thee

how 'twould be, but hear thou would'st not. Thou would'st cling to thy Laura, eh ? thou would'st cling, and cling, and wildly cling, to the daw with dogged bigotry, with blind-struck obstinacy : and now thou seest what she was—a slut, a hop-heels, a runaway wanton— Nay, shake not thus thy head ! Faith, I could smite thee on the cheek, girl ! Defend her, were it but by one stirring of the head, and I vow I souse thee roundly on the cheek ! . . . Well, may you fare well. As for me, I am off ".

Calvo's motives, we have said, were at present corrupted by the proffers of Wolsey : but, in order to abandon Bessie, he had needed the sweep of a passion, for which Laura now offered him the excuse, while his own lash whipped it up to whiteness, the heart not knowing the full truth of its own impurity : so that when he threatened to smite her on the cheek it was in obstreperous reply to somewhat in his breast which was shyly whispering : " Thou meritest, Calvo, that she should smite thee on the cheek ! "

Now the bag was on the back of Sidney, who, his interest in the fugitives being concentrated in Calvo, had for Bessie and Laura no special care ; yet he looked back with a lingering pity on that bowed head, as he went up two steps with the magister, then through a passage to the front door.

Bessie Ford raised her head, and was alone. . . But the desolation of her life scared her. She sprang up and ran.

A foot-path dark under foliage led her out to the road, down which she ran desperately, a sound of " Oh-h-h . . ." coming out of her mouth ; and after a short time she heard steps ahead—Sidney's horse, Calvo's voice, the night all dark and washed with squalls of water.

" *Master Calvo !* "—a dark voice in the void.

He span round angrily. " Well, now, what is it ? "

" Don't you leave me, sir——! "

" Why, you talk like a child ! Is it not your own fault ? Certes, 'tis not mine ".

" Master Calvo, *for Christ's sake——!* "

" Your own fault, your own fault ".

" But don't you be leaving poor Bessie Ford ! "

" You see, you weep. But bide I, or go I, what have you to hope ? The ninny of a sister is gone beyond recall ".

" Yet don't you be leaving me, Master Calvo ! . . . When we set out from London, I told you, sir, I *told* you, that naught feared I, I said, were you with me : and so it has been—Oh, many a trouble, many a scathe, have I passed through since, and well 'scaped, for you were by me, my good right arm you were, sir, father that you have been to me and mine, oh my, oh my. And even yet, if you stay with me, even in this last darkness, who knows but that the good hand of God——"

" Bide I, or go I, 'twill be the same to you, the same to you, I promise ".

" Why, *nay*, sir ! My talisman and good fortune are you, whilst you bide ; but, go you from me, then all, all, were lost ! Oh, I swear it by the Cross of Christ, Master Calvo ! Something tells me—here in my panging bosom, sir—a lumpy pang like the last pang of death, my master—— Oh, God, sir, God, God, God . . ."

Now she choked utterly with sobbing, in that moment seeing the vision of her life all palled, foreknowing its final rueing with presages of doom strange as the cypresses of Gethsemane, gloomy as a rayless universe ; and there was a silence now : only her sobs were heard throbbing chronic in the watery murk, bursting as if the monotony of the rain's murmuring was afflicted with hiccup.

And presently Calvo : " Come with me, if you like ".

" Why, sir—now ? "

" If you like ".

" But, sir, must I not go to meet the foreign King in the wood ? "

" To what end ? Laura is gone. You do not want to go to France alone ; nor do I ".

" But I must go tell him——"

" Tell him, no ! Let him go to the devil ".

" Faith, what would he think of me, who made faithful rendezvous——? "

" Very good, you choose him, you see, rather than me. Your own fault all thorow. Farewell, farewell ".

" Master Calvo, you abandon me ! "—that cry wailed high on the night-winds.

And the words of answer were on his lips : " I'd liefer abandon life and all it holds " ; but instead, he said : " You may go to the devil ! "—with that masochism which is in men, pleasure in self-torture, a venomous revelling in one's own pangs, that may make a man say " the devil " when " my darling " is in his heart.

He moved on ; she followed him ; and anew she cried : " Master Calvo, *you abandon me !* "

" Well, you can come, if you like ", he said.

And, as he said it, she stood fixed—her excuse, which she thought real, being her rendezvous with Francis : but in reality she cherished a secret reluctance to leave the spot whence Laura had gone, a hope that she might not be far, a desperation of fidelity, a passionate waywardness of loyalty, which only the opening of the earth could have overcome ; and though, as Calvo went still forward, she followed with stops and runs, when his feet reached the bridge she would no further follow.

The sage was half-way across the bridge, close beneath his feet the swollen Winney darting free with bacchant feet, a brawling soliloquy in the dark, when in the south distance arose before him the sound of hoofs, lanthorn-lights moving ; and said Sidney : " The King, sir, must have news ; hither, meseems, come some of his riders ".

In the same moment, from the north side behind him, Calvo heard in the air the high calling voice of Bessie lamentably calling : " Good-bye, Master Calvo, sir ! "

And " Fiendly cattle—fiendly, cruel cattle ! " muttered Calvo, with a shaken fist at the approaching horsemen, venting all his own self-bitterness upon them, " to hunt a poor, woe-ridden lass, like a wounded leveret ! Be ye man ?

or be ye devil ? If devil, how now if I send you pelting to your place, ye herds ! Sidney, my bag !—and get you with your horse off the bridge, till I come "—now taking out of the bag a slender saw abstracted from Broughton Castle, and beginning to saw the bridge across—a plank scarcely three feet wide, with a rustic rail, supported but by one pile at the centre—sawing on, till the riders were close ; then he sprang up and ran, as with horn-lanthorns, trotting, they came ; and though most saved themselves by a sharp halt on their haunches, the foremost two, on entering upon the bridge, plunged with half the plank into the torrent.

The others then went along the bank, gazing with raised lanthorns at the death-struggle of horse and rider, till they sighted a second bridge, and, with precautions, passed across.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANNE AND BONNER

When fired by fever's phantom chase,
We fling aside the curtain's fold,
It shows a face—a pitying face— *Bethune.*

As Alvarada, with two comrades, galloped up the mountain-road, Laura sitting on a pillion behind him, Fitzgerald, Macdonald, and Bonner were also en route from the yon side of the mountain, a yokel having recounted to them the empty rumour that the devil, breathing Milky-way, had been again seen to stand, not one hour gone, at a door above Maddox : whereupon they had pelted to horse, and were away to the Maddox side of the mountain : and, six minutes afterwards, to Du Ballay's party at a friary on the yon side of the mountain the same tidings had been recounted : and they also had pelted to horse.

So anon, as Fitzgerald and his friends galloped up to the mountain's brow, they could hear ghosts of hoof-beats echoing in their rear, and they stretched their steeds to perishing speed.

Bonner bore an agitated lanthorn, so did Mac, also Alvarada's Queen's-man bore, to show the way, a torch which shrank and shrank from the rain : so the going and coming parties could hardly miss a meeting ; and ere ever Fitzgerald saw her, he was aware of the shriek of the beauty, then saw her, and drew rein and blade together, while Mac tossed his lanthorn to Bonner, and drew : and the brawl was almost momentary, though the Spaniard, weak as he was, hacked once at Fitz, at the same moment lifting his steed to a leap over a hedgerow ; but the animal, chopped in the instant of effort, crashed into bramble, pitching its freight away ; and while Fitzgerald leapt to

snatch the beauty from the mêlée of hoofs, Sir John Perrott, incapable at this time of combat, overrode, as he fled, his prostrate comrade, who horridly cried out ; while the Queen's-man, after two passes with Macdonald, on receiving a wound, disappeared with Sir John down the mountain : from the down-rush of which two a wayfarer who was moving up the mountain drew away to the roadside a moment—Bessie, bereft now of Calvo, and of all.

Above, the Queen's-man's torch, flinching, where it had fallen, from the rain, flickered upon a lovely face contorted with pain in the left hip. When Fitzgerald held her up Laura could hardly stand.

" Where is thy sister Bess ? " he asked.

" Lower down ", she gasped, " there is a side-path——"

" By Heaven, Fitz ! " cried Mac, " there is need for haste here lad ! There are those above which pelt down upon us ! "—the Du Ballay lot !—whereupon Fitz, springing to horse, plucked up Laura before him, and they started at risky pace down the steep, while Bonner held up a lanthorn to say " Why, Laura "—and smile.

And she, too, smiled a smile of pain.

Yet a minute, and he lifted the lanthorn again to her face, to say again " Laura—— "

And as he so held the shine, there shrilled from the black path this passionate cry of bliss and fright, " *Laura !* "

She saw Laura in Fitzgerald's arms ! and there, with a valour high now to the sublime and the divine, Bessie stood with outspread arms in the path of the spattering trample of hoofs.

But, aided by her cry, they descried her in time, and drew rein. . . .

" 'Tis Bessie ", said Laura to Fitzgerald, who knew it, and " Here, good Bess ", he cried with quick breath, " take her, she is lamed—and get quickly from this path, for others are upon us, and we turn back to fight ".

Her soul reeled within her ; bewilderment was the world ; but this one light-beam beamed in that wheeling mist :

it was *he* who had brought her Laura ! he, warrior of warriors was—somehow—on her side ! not against her any more !

At the moment she was distraught, caught in a storm of emotions, and, as he lowered Laura toward her arms, was showing a drawn and witless grin ; then, hardly conscious of any meaning in the act, she proceeded to drag out of her gown a letter, which she held up before Fitz, flaunting it like a trophy with a twisting wrist—the King's letter to the Cardinal, snatched by her from Anne's escritoire—the dark half-thought in her consciousness, as she so flaunted it, being " it was not you, really, who gave it to her ! it could not have been ! my surmising heart divines you, and dances ! "

But to Fitz this paper had no significance, nor did he even recognise it ; only Bonner, standing near with the lanthorn, recognised it with a start . . .

And no space for pratings and explanations ! Fitz and Mac threw their animals round, for distinctly now from above came the sounds of hoofs ; and they were away, Fitz, in the haste and goad of the moment, forgetting to make rendezvous with her.

But she called after him : " Master Fitzgerald ! "

He did not stop, but dragged back his gallop into a walk, she trotting bedraggled after him, abandoning Laura to stand as she could.

" You are on my side ! " she called.

Fitz, twisted backward, one palm on his horse's haunch, his face contorted in a hearkening effort that exhibited his top-teeth, called : " What say you ? *Quick !* "

" You are on my side ! "

" Why, sure . . . "

" Whither go you ? "

" To fight ".

" Where meet we ? "

" Hereabouts say ".

" Higher stands a wall to the right hand, still on to the

right a pond, then a hut : there in the hut shall I be awaiting you, Master Fitzgerald ! "

" Good, good. Away, Mac—— ! " and away went the gallopers, unaware against what odds, up past Alvarada lying by the roadside, who with a groan heard them darkly pass ; then, five minutes after, heard other steps, mixed with sighs—the sighs of Laura in her efforts to limp—and a groan rolled from his lips.

" My mother, someone is here in pain ", breathed Bessie.

" Oh, my hanch ! my hanch ! " sighed Laura wincing.

" Water ! Water ! " groaned the Spaniard, for the lashed rain-pour could not quench that craving : whereat Bessie made a step that way, groping—for ere this the Queen's-man's torch-light left there had flinched into final darkness ; and she touched a form, which panted : " I—die . . . "

" Can you not stand, my master ? "

" Cannot—stand . . . "

" 'Tis the Spanish nobleman, Bess—who would have —taken me——" moaned Laura, wincing.

" Ah, 'tis you ", sighed Alvarada—" and with your sister—'tis well so. Is there no water ? "

" No, sir, naught can I do now for you ", said Bessie, " since my sister is lamed ; her I will first place in safety, then return ".

So, helping the limper, Bessie now continued up-hill, peering on the right for the mass of green-grown wall—supposed to be Roman—which ran at right-angles from the road ; on touching which, she moved on over a moss-path at its foot, skirted next a pool, and at the pool's termination came upon a shed of thatch and wattle, rain-proof though dilapidated, deep within a grotto of greenery, where she saw that Francis had not yet come, although it could not now be far from compline : so, after depositing Laura on dry bush in the shed, kissing her, closing the door upon her, she set off running to refind Alvarada ; but the door, hinged with hide, hung askew, and as soon as released swung back, unseen in the dark.

At about the same moment Anne Boleyn, hastening up the mountain-road, stumbled over the Spaniard's body, pshawed, and pushed-on on her upward way . . .

That Laura was in Maddox Anne was certain ; that many men were searching for her all that afternoon she knew, as she herself in a rage of energy had searched inn-cellar and forest, cottage, dingle, and hut, only failing to discover the fugitives inasmuch as Sidney Boleyn had chosen for them an abode which was invisible in timber ; and she knew it to be probable that one or other of the seekers would now discover, also that the discoverer would probably be attacked : so when she had heard gun-shots, and seen lights and flashes up the road, she had run up toward the mêlée, her eyes eager as gimlets.

This mêlée was the encounter of Fitzgerald with the Du Ballay party—Du Ballay himself, wounded at the Broughton joust, being absent in the farmery of a Carmelite friary behind the mountain's brow ; but the Du Ballay men were five : and Mark Bonner, spying his two friends thus outnumbered, and being in a high-wrought state at the fresh sight of Laura, rushed with a desperate breast into the fight, the very first incident of which was a rip in his loins.

But the two warriors of Bessie Ford proved raw rock to the teeth of these her enemies : for Mac, with a fixed lip fought with his resistance of promontories in sea-storms, and the high valour of the arm of Fitz naught that night could withstand : he, close now on his hopes, fought with a laugh, as he cleft one of the French knights through ring-mail from shoulder to heart ; one he stabbed through the mouth ; a third, wounded by Mac, himself wounded by a bullet, turned and flew up the road with his two comrades, they lacking motive for strenuous combat in the absence of their commander ; and Fitz and Mac pursued a little.

So it was that, as Anne got to the spot of the battle, she saw Bonner in the glare of two over-turned lanthorns, as he saw her spattered face, a lady's yet a hag's, her hair sprawling in draggled streaks to her haunch, in her cheek

no killing dimples, but exhaustion, ugly gauntness, her eyes a glare, her gullet dry and grating.

Seeing him, she had a throe of joy. " Why, Mark . . . not wounded ? "

" It is you . . . Faith, I am dying "—on fainting breaths.

" Dying, poor soul ? "

" Faith, I am sore wounded . . . Oh, it went right in ".

" It did ? "—in a whisper, leaning over him.

" You are the Lady Anne . . . How came you here ? Faith, you are very good. You have no idea—Faith, I am sore wounded——"

" Whine not, boy. See, I kiss you. Now tell me, darling, *where* is Laura ? "

" Oh, 'tis bitter—the bare, cold steel——"

" Why, you whine like a girl ! Like you not my kisses ? Tell me now—darling—*where* is Laura ? "

" Why, you are very good . . . But Laura ! Nay, I would not tell you for all the world . . . Gar—it aches——"

" Doth it ? Why, poor ousel. I'll kiss the place and make it well in a pigeon-dunging's space . . . So you *know* where Laura is ? Then, wherefore refuse to tell ? "

" Because—'tis unbounded !—the outrage of the blade's edge upon the cherished flesh——"

" But tell me !—Am I not Laura's friend and helper ? "

" Oh, that can I not now credit ! Did you not abstract the King's letter from my— ? Ah, yes, a wound is a fearful thing—a wound above all—above all—in the loin——"

" Abstract the King's letter ? I ? Yea, but did I not abstract it in order to give to Bess ? You had no horse, and I one. By Christ's Cross, Mark, I gave it her ! Mark, I gave it her, I did, I did, I swear to God ! Tell me, boy—*tell* me ".

" Faith, it pangs, lady—it pangs too close and bitingly ! Oh, say you so ? 'Twas *you* gave the letter to Bess ? "—ever writhing, he remembered now that he had lately beheld the letter flaunted by Bessie's wrist before Fitz's eyes.

" You know, then, that she has it ? "—incessantly kissing

him : " and whence think you, dear, could she have it, but that *I* gave it her ? "

" Then, you are verily her friend and helper. . . . Faith, kiss me still—it lulls. Wot you ?—it went right in. You pity poor Mark Bonner, do you ? Her good friend and helper, I swear. Oh ! "

" Poor boy ! let me rock thee in mine arms . . . Now tell me—*where* is she ? "

" I know not precisely—heard Bess tell Fitzgerald—there is a wall—then a pool—then a hut : and in the hut are they—Oh ! "

Anne knew wall, and pool, and hut ! in the hut had thrice searched that day ! and as the words passed Bonner's lips, with brutish ruthlessness she dashed his head from her lap, to be gone into the gloom.

Without troubling to run down the road to the wall, she plunged at once into the forest, hurrying south-eastward for the hut ; but in such a darkness such a course was overbold, the line which she took not precisely right, so that she passed by the hut ; and now in a fret of haste rushed fumbling about, mumbling a thousand oaths, well guessing that the moments were golden, and now all sense of direction lost in her ! But at last, led by the fate which doomed her life to tragedy, her palm, blindly groping, touched woven dry wattle, and now she was like the castaway, who, a sail in sight, cries " saved ! "

But no sound of talking . . . On groping her way round the hut her hand met the out-swung door, the doorway : and she stood with bent ear — no sound ; peered within, could see nothing.

Her heart sank at a sense of failure ; but, when, on putting in a cautious paw of the cat, she touched a shoe, she was like the castaway conscious of the stalking squad of oars approaching ; and now, too, she could hear a breathing—for Laura, feebly-built, and exhausted, tortured, had fallen asleep.

Now Anne ran ; but soon stopped, bewildered, looked

for the pool and did not see it, nor could remember whether the hut-door looked toward, or from, the pool ; so she presently ran on afresh at hazard, though, in fact, nearly whither she wished.

By which time Bessie was bending over the Spaniard at the extremity of the pool nearest the shed, having drawn and borne his weight so far toward the shelter of the shed : but there all the Spaniard's self-help had failed, and she had failed also.

With quick fan his breath said : " Girl, I am dying . . . "

She pressed his hand.

" Art verily the sister of Laura Ford ? "

" Yes, my master ".

" Know you that 'twas I who this day bore her off from you ? "

" 'Twere ill talking of that now, sir ; and, since you so talk, think you I give you not all my heart in this your hour ? "

" Dost thou ? "

" Why, I do ".

" And I my heart to thee. Could I but live two days, my arm, my life——"

" Prithee, speak not, sir, but compose your soul. Oh, faith, 'tis a mighty, fair, and wondrous thing to die ! "

" Kiss me, Bessie . . . Yes . . . Fair art thou in mine eyes in this my dying . . . Now turn up my steel shirt at the bottom ".

She turned it up.

" Now intrude thy hand beneath my girdle. . . . What find'st thou ? "

" A key, sir "

" A key—ah, my moment is come, fair Bessie. I seem to see a universe of moons that move and move. . . . The key —it opens a coffre-fort which lies for me in the keeping of mine host of the Bell Inn, in Eastcheap. Thou seest, I fail —I fail. The coffre-fort holds 27,000 gold rose-nobles— they are thine. The wyvern at my collar is the pledge

agreed for their delivery. Take it quick, lest thou despoil—the dead——"

With his own hand he snatched the pledge from his throat, and presented it to her : in a few moments more she knew that he was dead.

And death was—what ? A universe of moons that move —where ? where in the universe of mood and tune ? Much lately she had fallen into thinking of that very thing—of death—she, a girl in her nonage, tough, too. But now with her thought of death was all mixed up the thought of her new riches : a sum not measurable, King's-wealth, by my credit. She would go sometimes to visit them in their grand mansion in France, the married couple, Master and Mistress Mark Bonner ! for no longer she believed Anne's tale of Mark's kisses : Anne, who had lied as to Fitz, might have lied as to Bonner also, to spite her ; and, seated there, she had a brief gleam of gladness, a tear of gratitude dropping from her upon Count Alvarada's brow ; but the sudden thought of Calvo—her talisman gone now—pricked her, and she sprang up.

To hurry to the hut. And, as she moved, someone brushed by her : a woman—Anne.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ORDEAL

I hear Him in the mighty roar
That rusheth through the forest hoar
When winds are raging loud. *Anonymous.*

Anne, feeling that someone was near, stopped, bewildered as to direction, not having yet seen the pool, and said : " Who are you there ? I have lost my way ! "

Even as she spoke, Bessie, without fail, deeply knew her ; knew, too, that she came from the direction of the shed ; also that Laura, lame, could not run, could scarcely walk : and it was in a tone strange, unlike her own, yet not feigned, that she said : " Whither would you go ? "

Now, Anne, famished and over-driven, her spirit spinning now on a tiptoe of ecstasy, was hardly any longer competent of cautious thought, and answered : " Across the river "—where, Bessie was aware, Henry's tents lay.

A stillness followed, horrible enough there in the dismal and dripping forest ; until Bessie muttered : " I will lead you "—turning south, so as to gain the river through the wood, not *she* remembering that Calvo had sawn through the Maddox bridge, but something in her brain which thought for her, and said : Do it.

And on she plodded through the dark, not admitting to herself that the bridge was sawn, nor thinking at all, except of this one thing : that hell led her, as she led Anne, lifted her feet, planted them for her—steadily in the same direction—and that this was sweet, though dreadful.

That Anne was on the way to bring Henry upon Laura she was sure ; also she was taught, by the dark doom-voices which admonish, that, if she did not now do to Anne

the thing which she was bid, then would Anne without fail bring upon her head a rain of woes.

Onward, then : her cheeks pinched, her teeth anon chattering a little. But so small a thing as her robe caught in thorns sufficed to prick her numbed mind ; and, having disengaged it, she muttered, as she again stepped on, " Now, may the good God keep my hands from evil . . . " a prayer mechanical, unreal, empty of sensation : for, though she hated Anne rancorously as females hate, not even hatred it was that led her here, but the thing that lifted her feet, and set her going like a clock, her moral nature having collapsed to a stroke of crime-mood, as to a stroke of paralysis or shock of apoplexy ; so a squall, leaping out, overwhelms some little sail, and with the easy suddenness of a wink over goes the skiff—to every infamy, Goethe thinks, every man being liable. Happy the well-built craft that rights herself—with a shudder from keel to pennant.

But it was dark—no path—and the clock-work object that led Anne to her death anon met obstructions in the brambly brushwood, at each of which mere mechanism, incapable of advancing, had to think a little : hence a habit of thinking growing : until, toward the end, a spirit with angry impatience was ejaculating " Oh, save me from this ! "

However, it was the cry of one fighting in nightmare, tied hand and foot : constantly she advanced, without haste or rest, Anne following her sounds, and ever her teeth-edges met in chatterings like sparrow-peckings, though she was actually reasoning to herself in a species of lucid lunacy when the stream, rushing free, its bands forgot, began to surround them with its growing shout . . .

" This woman whom I have never hurt, how she hath hunted and beset me ! I hate her, for first she hated me ; and I will choke her life in the water, and gladly hear the cry of her agony, for first she wanted to choke my every hope in shame and horror. I will not stop—I will walk straight

on to the water. I can hear the water shout, and I know how she will feel at the moment when her feet step on emptiness, and the world turns all into whirling waters to her. I am not a bad-hearted girl, and how she hath hunted and beset me ! How she hath hunted and beset me ! I hate her with rage, for first she hated me ; and I think God will not be judging me harsh, for now, if I bring her not to the ghastly bridge, and choke her throat in the water, whose shout grows and fills my head, she will still hunt and beset me, and now, *this night*, will be final woe to me. Well and fair have I meant, God wot : so she should have let me be, that woman, she should not have lit this thing in me, nor hated me first. I will not stop—I will walk doggedly on to the ghastly water, for 'tis God—perhaps—who hath wrought it so to a chance most rare, and given her into my hand, just when she would do me final woe, that I may choke her throat in the river's roaring, and be for ever rid of her, rid, rid of her, that woman. My mother, how the shout of the water fills one's ears ! I can hardly hear the sound of her feet now. Oh, save me, save me, from this . . . !" Now she flung her face upward with an impious impatience, the smitten skiff trying, straining, to right itself . . .

But she did not stop, pulled onward in the tow of a power that constantly counselled : " Do it ! Laura is *lame*, cannot flee, and your chance is rarer than a thousand thousandth ; she asks the way, you guide her right ; as regards the bridge, *you* know not that it is sawn—how *could* you know ? "

Now, the forest ended, they were spattering through pasture, when Anne said : " On faster, good woman ! "

But Bessie did not quicken her steps, as they passed down a lane of six dark houses, and now were on the river-strand.

And there at once and suddenly her prayer was answered, her temptation solved, when Anne panted : " I give you thanks—now I know my way "—for yonder across the river twinkled the lamps of the King's camp ; and now

Anne bent into running ; but stopped to scramble a crown into Bessie's hand : and Bessie took it, and said nothing.

But she was saved from murder, she saw ! for, as a bird to the snare, Anne ran toward her doom in voluntary suicide—and she after Anne, hardly knowing for what reason, her teeth-edges now running the rattle of a steady chattering . . .

And now Anne, having found out the dark plank, entered upon the part of it yet left with pressing steps ; while Bessie, at its end, one foot resting on it, stood and pried, her soul focused in her eyes . . .

" Go not on ! " she tried to cry, but the cry was strangled in her larynx ; and once more she tried, and no cry rose . . .

But now it was a question, not of murder, but of mercy : and, at her third attempt to shout, she who had found the negative hard rose with gallant naturalness, like a swamped life-boat, to the height of the positive harder : for, irritably clearing her throat and pitching her breath to a cry of triumph, she screamed : " Why, woman, go not on ! The bridge is broken . . . "

She was in time, as the virtuous are : seeing which, she turned and ran.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CAPTURE

Ah, I maun crush among the stour
Thy slender stem :
To save thee now is past my power,
Thou bonnie gem. *Burns.*

Bessie, having bawled her warning, ran northward in an ague of boding anguish which hardly left her a moment to the day of her death, though the situation of her affairs contained no *prima facie* reason for this extreme mental tremor : for she knew that her defender, Francis, would even then be at the shed awaiting her : Fitzgerald, too : but she could not view her case thus reasonably, and her bosom, knowing its own secret, boded waywardly.

And, in fact, when she reached the shed neither Francis nor Fitzgerald was yet there ; only Laura breathed in sleep on the leaves : and Bessie, seated near, took her knees between her arms, and trembled there with a bent head and sideward-leering eyes, listening in panic, waiting in craven collapse.

Anne, meanwhile, having heard the warning call, had turned back ; and, knowing that there was another bridge to the stream a mile lower, toward this with flying heels she hied, went over, and so over hillock and level to the King's tents—one big in the midst, four smaller, beneath a grove of trees, from all, at all seams, gleaming ruddy streaks ; and to the nearest of the four stepped Anne on tiptoe, lifted an edge of flap, to peep at some martialists lounging on the ground among harness and arms, playing backgammon, and devouring a mass of cowheel and bacon ; whence she stepped on to the next, hoisted a flap-edge, spied Charles Brandon boisterously dicing on a chest-top with Knevet, a brass-work cruse lamp nigh them, a

flagon of Lachrimae in Charles's grasp ; and she intruded her nose to groan " *Charles* . . . "

" Who goes ? " cries he.

" Anne ".

" Anne ! you ? " cried Brandon aloud, half drunk.

Now, on the further side of the curtain that fell from the tent's apex, dividing it into two apartments, reclined my Lord Cardinal, writing ; and he heard Charles Brandon say " Anne ! you ? "

So he was not slow in stealing through the flap-door of his side and creeping half-way round the canvas, whence his ear could catch Anne's panting passion of tidings : so that, even as Brandon cried " Knevet, we have the girl ! " and spurted towards Henry's tent, Wolsey was carrying his mass at an earnest trot toward another tent, where lay seven of his men.

He hissed " Burrowes ! ", and, when a man ran to him, with an intense emphasis he whispered : " To horse all of you, secretly and instantly ! At a soundless walk go hence ten yards, then gallop like devils ! Up the mountain-road, a wall to your right, a pool, then a hut ; in the hut the maids : whip them off to Baneleigh Tavern ! Burrowes, Burrowes, be swift and silent, I charge thee. No light take ; and remember the demolished bridge. Nothing forget—all do. Be gone . . . "

Which whisper dropped, Wolsey trotted his bulk clandestinely back to his own tent, reclined, quietly took quill in fist, and wrote as before.

And, in fact, fully six minutes before the King's, the champions of Wolsey were dashing toward Maddox, unseen, yet somehow felt by Bessie seated in a heap of leaves near her sleeping sister, her knees between her hands, quivering continuously like aspen in a breeze, with bent head, with sideward-leering eyes, listening in panic, waiting in craven collapse.

Waiting for Francis, waiting for Fitzgerald, waiting for fate ! and Francis and Fitzgerald came not . . .

Both, though, were coming at a gallop, Francis accompanied by four of his gallants, he being in reality the soul

of punctuality ; but, the little pathway that led from Fenley to Maddox having been missed by his cavalcade in the dark, they had lost twenty minutes in wanderings.

As for Fitz and Mac, they had hunted the three Du Ballay men up to the very mountain's brow, without overtaking ; and now the heart of Fitz, thinking of Bonner groaning by the roadside, would let him no farther gallop : so back with sweating brows down the mountainside they pelted scouting, till they pounced upon the scholar : and here was more delay.

But when the slash had been bandaged with a belt, and Bonner was in Fitz's arms upon his charger, they set off, bound at last for Bessie and the shed, down the mountain : had hardly, however, gone on forty yards, when the spatter of hoofs up-galloping startled them : and since the unknown party was without lanthorns, when in a moment it encountered the three comrades, it seemed to dart out of the dark upon them.

They were the Wolsey-men, who, owing to Wolsey's too-wary mandate against lanthorns, had galloped up a good way past " the wall " in their darkness, " the wall " not being an obvious landmark to foreigners to the country-side, and they had looked for something obvious ; but Mac had lanthorn-light, so that, as the two groups drew nigh, Fitzgerald was recognised by Wolsey's Burrowes, who drew sword ; upon which Fitzgerald, as he drew, dropped Bonner with what gentleness he could ; while Mac, tossing aside the lanthorn, tackled Burrowes. Aiming to hack a way through the six now left to his single hand, and so pelt to the shed, Fitzgerald entered the fray with pestilent tempestuousness, but had to mow down four before he found his path open. And now, abandoning Mac for Be sie, he went scampering madly downward, but with his head dropping like a nodding sleeper's : and his eyes closed, he moaned in dream, toppled sideward, crashing into bramble, deeply chopped in the back.

At the same time the Wolsey-men, pressed to do their

errand, went speeding on their upward way, seeking " the wall ", leaving the unconquerable Macdonald alive on his two feet, with five wounds. At the same time also, Henry, with five, passed, lower down, from the high-road into the wood, moving along the wall's foot.

And Bessie, sitting with her continuous moaning, knew of the approaching hoofs : and knew, almost as though she saw them, that here were the hoofs of neither Francis nor Fitz.

She did not rise, nor move, but rocked her body and knees, with a constant moaning.

Then light was in her eyes ; then Harry entered ; and with that chill horror which she had of him she felt his presence and flinched gnashingly, as when through a man's flesh a razor slowly moves, although it was some minutes before her eyes would lift a little to him : and then she saw that Harry was supporting Laura round the waist with his right arm, while with his left forefinger he held up her chin ; and a man had a lanthorn lifted to show the lovely visage.

Laura Ford's lids were shyly lowered, and her lips—smiling.

At that moment a man with a face blood-washed and a bared sword dashed through the gentlemen at the shed-door : one who had sworn to defend Bessie Ford, and ever remembered—James Macdonald ; and with a jerk of the head, he sent out the words : " Have them you shall not, while I live, Sir King—— ! "

But Henry spoke in time. " Cut me down this mad dog ".

So at the door itself the swords leapt to cross : and obstinately, in his strong-lipped way, though quite tottery at present, Macdonald defended himself against five blades during two full minutes' space ; until, dressed from head to foot in red, he gave in, drooped, fell dead.

And when she saw him drop—so bloodily, and so tragically, and so trustily—Bessie lost her sorrows in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BESSIE IN LABOUR

. . . On her now
A curtain blacker than the night is dropped
For ever ! . . .
Rogers.

The girls, captured at twenty minutes past compline on a Saturday night, were at once taken to a separate tent amid the King's tents ; and it was not till five minutes afterwards that Francis, with three, arrived at the hut—three of his six having been precipitated at the broken bridge into the Winney—to find the hut empty, save for Macdonald laid dead there.

Then at five on the Sabbath morning a party of nine, led by Charles Brandon, set out from Henry's tents, bound for London : the two girls, mounted—though Bessie was in a condition of debility—being in their midst ; and at London, at two in the Monday morning, they arrived.

Meanwhile, Henry, with Wolsey and some twenty, had rejoined his main body stationed at Fletcherfield, and with his whole force had set out for London, which he reached near noon on the Tuesday, the serene array of steeds trailing through the streets, raining a hail of hoof-falls, the trouble over, the war won, the boys at home once more.

As for Fitzgerald and Bonner, their wounds, though grave, not being " dangerous ", in a week's time they were occupying a garret between the Old Wool Market and Almoner's Yard, Westminster, where lay Caxton's press : and these two, sleeping three or four hours in the twenty-four, were seeking through London for the sisters.

Francis, too, assured by the departure of the English Royal camp, that Henry had the pearl, and spurred by many spurs—by love and veneration for the " angel "

resting on her way, who had bespoken him in the wood, by jealousy of Henry, by a spirit of enterprise—had sent back his camp to his ship, and, accompanied only by the Chevalier d'Arcy, was prosecuting in disguise from a solitary dwelling at St. Botolph, beyond the city-wall at Bishop's Gate, a quest of the sisters.

Nor did Wolsey ever despair : even though the Helen was in that dragon-grasp of Henry, he still was seeking—with infinite secrecies, intricate skill ; of which search, Anne Boleyn, returned to London, had acquired tidings, and smiled, meditating within herself : " Now that old Harry hath her no power will rob him of her, till he wants her no more ".

All this time Bessie and Laura were in a Bankside house, the property of Lord Thomas Howard—" Bankside " at this date being hill-land, scrubby, and blasted, at the back of Southwark High-street, extending, we imagine, from St. Mary Overie, near London Bridge, quite to Lambeth Palace ; at its east end, overlooking the river, were Rochester House, Winchester House ; west of these, a collection of slum-houses, timber-framed, called " The Stews " ; and west of " The Stews ", on a plateau, a very ancient house, low and black, the summit only of whose roof, and a turret-top, was visible behind an enclosure of battlemented wall : this house, called " Rain (Reine ?) House ", being in the mortmain of the Dukes of Norfolk, and now Lord Thomas's. And behind the mystery of these walls lay the sisters.

For a week nothing happened. But at the end of that time Fitzgerald, Wolsey, and Francis had, each for his own part, decided that here was probably the hiding-place he sought : and Wolsey, who knew that Henry had not yet been to the beauty (for his hundred eyes were spying), knew that it was not too late for enterprise ; while Fitz and Francis, supposing that some time would be spent in courtship, hoped that it was not too late for enterprise.

So on the eighth midnight Fitz was over the battlemented wall, made his way through a lattice, struck light

to a rush, and proceeded to seek through the vacancy of those ancient chambers. He had come certain of going where his Mac was gone, certain of being opposed by overwhelming force, but was met only by a little woman in undress bearing a taper—a buxom, dimpled person of middle-age in a pinked porringer, who perked, and appeared perfectly surprised ! and behind her peered an elderly husband, whose expression preached reproach, these seeming to be the comptrollers of the deserted hermitage.

When Fitz said " Yield me the two maidens ye hold, lest I run you through ", they seemed extremely alarmed ! no maidens held they there, they could swear, and would lead him direct through the mansion, even though he merited the Marshalsea for " infraction ". This they did : and Fitz went away convinced that his suspicions had misled him.

Two hours afterwards Francis and D'Arcy effected an entrance, went away convined that their suspicions had misled them, and the following midnight a body of Wolsey-men, masked, broke into the close, and went away convinced that their suspicions had misled them.

The girls, meantime, were in a turret connected to the house by a causeway : a turret in which the searchers, on entering it. had found themselves in an apartment with a vault and floor of stone ; and, since the turret was not lofty, the impression produced was that all over this vault was solid stone-work, though a certain stone, removed from the flooring, would have shown some steps, which, after descending, ascended within the thickness of the wall to a portal and to two rooms above.

These two rooms were separated by a rude wall containing a Gothic door of oak, big, ponderous with iron, which at each curfew the dimpled woman in the pinked porringer locked, the beauty sleeping in the outer, or stair-room, Bessie being led within ; but when on the fourth day Laura noticed that the key was not withdrawn, thenceforward, as

soon as the woman left them, the two lay together in Bessie's bed, until they thought that day was dawning.

There was no window, save a little hole overhead ; so candle-light stared there in iron sconces the day long.

Bessie was sick and, in general, sat shivering in her ague, wrapped in her arms ; whereas her sister flourished in this stuffy air, faring sumptuously, and with steady appetite, on venison-pasty and ypocras jelly, halibut engrailed, godwit, and heron and peacock, so that she fattened like a duck, and her loveliness swelled to a sort of royalty and authority in contrast with the little figure of Bessie in its peasant garb —incongruous with the arm-chair of plush in which she cowered sideways with glum eyes agaze, hugging her agues.

And so till the tenth day, when they were conducted down and out into the jungled close for their lungs' good, the dimpled woman in the pinked porringer following, making herself pleasant with many a perk and curtesy and praise of the beauty's beauty—a day of Summer drenched in streams of glory, though under the close's jungle the greenish gleam which leaked through was enchanted to a mood of shadow and dream, as in shrubberies of Kubla, where lady-birds sail the slumbrous air, and from bumble-bees that cruise like steamboats, a musing boom streams-out, like funnel-smokes streaming. But at the gate, through gratings in a wicket, they could see the river glittering, with little sails on it that flitted, lit up ; or anon they saw a nobleman's barge gliding, long and low like gondolas, its high stem bent inward atop, toward the King's Stairs, where the nobleman landed cloaked, to pass beneath the Clock Tower of Old Palace Yard, by Westminster Hall, by St. Stephen's Chapel, and so to the Palace, to disappear full of aims and schemings that seemed to him momentous ; while eastward yonder soared the needle of St. Paul's ; visible, too, the mouth of the fierce-flowing little Fleet ; and the Queen's Bridewell Palace ; the frater-roof of the Grey Friars ; some turrets also of Savoy Palace ; and St. Mary's Hospital ; and Durham House ; and the Whitehall

of Wolsey ; and they saw a punt (that carried horses) coming to a little gulf near them, here being Stangate Horse Ferry ; and on the pinnacles of the Westminster Palace six flags waving, a gala polychrome of green, crimson, yellow, streaming small within the vast Walhalla-hall of the hollow vault of heaven.

But as they stood there looking at all that spectacle of splendour, something ominous came to molest them, and Laura started backward with the breath : " Our Saviour, 'tis sure token of death . . . ! " when four crows roughly croaking rushed low past them, flapping so palpably close, as almost to touch the portal's arch ; upon which the dimpling woman, who also saw it, took each by an arm to lead them away ; and after an hour's breath they were led back to the turret.

Thenceforward they were regularly led out every noon ; and Laura, growing nothing less than gay, would grin prettily, giving a single hand-clap, at a squirrel, with " O, 'tis minion. . . ! " whereas Bessie, waiting, watchful, astonished at this grace, never got better of her chronic ague.

Why did not Henry come ? It was because, like men at a crisis, he was being pulled two ways : for he was intelligent —in comparison with other kings ; and he was " conscientious " ; so that day after day he passed in ever-repeated struggle, forgetting tax, forced-loan, and council-chamber. Bessie Ford had called him " *Father* ", and her tone was in his ears ; had said " *Don't you do it !* " ; and one day, disguised, he had taken boat at the Palace-stair to go, but near Stangate Horse-Ferry on the Surrey-side had ordered the bow round again, grumbling from the depths of his struggle : " By Heaven, 'tis an honest poor soul . . . "

Never, though, had he known his own deepest intent, did he really mean to " be good ", for, look, " he was a prince of most royal courage, and sooner than miss any part of his will, he would endanger one half of his Kingdom "—as Wolsey said of him.

So on the twelfth day the dimpled woman in the pinked

porringer said to the beauty, the three being then side by side on a bench within the slumbrous umbrage of an ivy-tod : " Will you come with me, dearie ? *I would show you a thing* ".

This woman and her wheedling way Bessie had long ere this got to abhor : and she started, asking : " Shall I not come with my sister, Mistress Halliday ? "

The woman, dimpling, lisped : " Why, no harm meant, my faith, to your sweet, sweet sister, girl. Lord's light, how pretty she's looking to-day, too ! Her lips are as slippery as butter, I swear, and her eyes are bright like a bullock's. No, troth, I'd liefer she came alone . . . "

Bessie stood up. " Yet will I go with her ".

But, as she stood, the elderly man of the mansion appeared through the bushes, put a rough hand on her shoulder, and severely said : " Such demeaning of yourself, girl, is not meet, and can further you nothing. Here you tarry ! "—on which she fell back helpless upon the bench, face in hands, while the woman, taking Laura by the arm, said " Come, you darling ".

The intenser anguish of the situation here lay, not in the fact that the sisters were in the grip of a force, but in the fact that the younger sister did not *resist* the force ! After one reluctant shake of the left shoulder, the beauty went with the pinked porringer, curious to see what that thing was which would be shewn her.

So she was led toward the mansion, was away from Bessie twenty minutes, and then the two, led back to the turret, were left alone.

A silence now, as they sat side by side in Laura's room : Bessie waiting for Laura to recount, Laura mute.

" Well, Laura—— ? " said Bess.

" Darling Bessie ", said Laura.

" What led she thee to see, Laura ? "

" Phew ! 'Twas some gallant who would be courting me—phew ! "

'Twas King Henry the Eighth, and this Laura knew.

" A gallant, Laura Ford? And what said he to thee, Laura? "

" Naught but a heap of blag and paltering folly !—I paid no heed to what he said ! "

Bessie's reading gaze was on her face. " And what did he, Laura? "

" Oh, naught did he. What could he, Bess? Thou knowest gallant's waggish play—he but touched my cheek with his finger-tips ".

" And, Laura, thou lettest him? "

" Phew ! not I : I knocked his hand right away ! "

Bessie in her woe felt sweet healing, and went to kneel to the other.

But again the next day Laura was taken away for twenty minutes, while Bessie, guarded in the ivy-tod, waited ; and that day the answers of Laura on their reunion were not so satisfactory, confusion in her looks.

And thenceforth every day, for three days, the sisters were separated, every day for twenty minutes ; and on the third day Laura returned with a face as red as day-dawn.

That which was now corroding the breast of Bessie Ford was the canker of a rancorous jealousy : for Laura's answers had become indefinite, irritable, sometimes self-contradictory, obviously false ; and with Bessie's fears was now mingled a venom and a gall which seemed to parch up her heart. There were instants when, suspecting her sister, she detested her But ten seconds afterwards she would be sobbing out all her heart upon Laura's neck, crying out, even for Christ's sake, for Laura's love and loyalty.

In this state of crazy jealousy was she on the fourth day that Laura, with hardly any more pretence of vexation, was led away by the pinked porringer to the mansion : she sitting in the ivy-tod's shadow, the elderly man at her side, his staying hand on hers.

But she could no longer bear it : for of the identity of *the gallant* who daily saw her sister she had gained a suspicion

like a dagger in her flesh ; and this day she wrenched her sleeve from her keeper, to take to her fleet heels.

On approaching the mansion, pursued, she saw a door open, dashed through, and in two minutes had scurried through an intricacy of rooms and corridors, triangular nooks, stairs of three steps, arrassed tiring-rooms, rotting bed-chambers ; till now, about to turn into a certain corridor, at the corner she saw, and stopped, and gasped.

Laura and a man stood there, his two hands on her arms, he talking gravely, undergazing rather : for her head was hanging well down, her face shaded with shreds of hair which draped it ; and, as a black mask which the man had-on now stuck above the horizontal from his forehead, Bessie saw that it was Henry.

The elegant legs, close clad, one projected ; the bulky body in a girdled jerkin of black velvet : it was he ; and she noticed the look of complicity here ; the confidential murmur of the self-sure lover.

Low hung Laura's face, all draped in hair ; and now that face was pale.

Bessie saw the bent head nod once : it seemed a nod of assent ; then the other spoke some moments, and Bessie agape saw the bent head nod again : it seemed a nod of assent . . .

But now a sudden palm was over Bessie's mouth, and she was wrenched backward away round the corner by the pinked porringer.

That day the sisters, when reunited in the turret, did not speak, shunned each other's eyes ; and in the afternoon when the woman brought up a basket containing a repast Bessie, with jealous rage, remarked that Laura at present ate with no effusive approval of the tempting food : the beauty was subdued, and mused.

And when, between angelus and compline, another meal came Laura ate not at all ; though, when the woman pressed upon her a goblet of Tokay, she nodded royal consent, took face from palm, and drank largely.

Both beds having that day been relaid with stiff clean covertures, sheets of cambric, and down-coverlets of basted white silk, the woman now, as she looked finally round, inspected like a drill-sergeant the bed of Laura, then hitched finishingly at here a sheet-corner, there a cambric-edge : and this Bessie saw with her still underlook . . .

Then the woman said " come " to Bessie, led her into the inner chamber, extinguished her lights, shut the door, turned the key ; but that night, for the first time, did not extinguish Laura's lights, kissed Laura with gushing benediction on both cheeks, and backed away with meeknesses of the knee, Laura pallidly smiling, with one shoulder-shrug.

Now, it was Laura's nightly custom, after some minutes, to run in to her sister ; but this night Bessie waited, and Laura did not come.

Laura was in bed sitting : Bessie crouching at her door.

Poor abandoned bosom, in that hour her tongue knew the smack of the inhumanity of man, and her soul an outer cold of loneliness. Laura did not go to her : and it was as though there was no God in Heaven, nor any care anywhere for a poor soul wanting help ; and many tears she shed there in the dark, tasting smart, kneeling on her knees, her arms thrown up against the oak, her forehead dropping great drops.

But she arose after an hour and began to pound upon the door . . .

Whereat Laura started, with a whisper of " Our Saviour ! ", but did not open, having the excuse that the sounds came faint.

Soon, however, came new sounds, loud now, produced by a stool which Bess, with a branded brow, was banging against the door ; and with every bang Laura's heart thumped, and her body started, as though struck by the operating ram ; till, after a while, no longer able to withstand that strong summons, she cast up her eye-whites, stealthily hurried from her bed, and turned the key—

beautiful that night in her nudity, pale, her hair well piled and built.

She met the eyes of a judge there . . .

" Why camest not to be with me to-night, girl ? " Bess asked.

" Bess ", said Laura timorously, " I fell asleep ".

" Asleep, girl ? and why opened'st not when I knocked ? "

" Our Saviour ! thou knocked'st so soft ".

" So soft, so soft ", moaned Bess, covering her face now, crying silent with a mouth stretched wretchedly wide and tense.

But soon she was looking steadily again at Laura, who looked at the ground ; and " To-night ", Bessie said, " I wil. sleep in thy bed, thou in mine ".

" Why, nay, Bessie ! " protested Laura : " be reasonable, do ! 'tis too much, you know, at the end of the tale ".

Bessie stretched her forefinger. " Do it, girl. You see that stool ? there where you stand I brain you therewith, if you resist my bidding ".

A push at the shoulder threw Laura stumbling into the dark room ; and Bessie closed the door, turned the key.

After some time she puffed out the lights, went to bed ; and like a ship's jib shivering in the wind's eye, so, lying, she shivered.

Later she heard the key of the stair-portal stir, then heard the word " darkness ? " uttered, then felt that someone was with her, touched her shoulder . . . " Laura . . . pig's-eye . . ."

Bessie Ford uttered this word : " *Sire* ".

Now the wrist of that chill horror which she had of him shook her with strong shuddering . . .

But as a lamb that is led to the shambles, so was she.

CHAPTER XL

TWENTY-SEVEN THOUSAND NOBLES

Then forth the chest he brought,
They pressed the secret spring :
With pearls 'twas fraught and broidries wrought,
And many a precious thing. *Old Ballad.*

She had the inward certainty that this sacrifice of her girlhood would bring about her sister's liberation and ultimate salvation : and so it was.

The next morning the pinked porringer, entering the room, saw the extinguished lights, which the visitor had had no means of relighting, saw Bessie Ford in deep sleep, there where she thought to see Laura, took note of the look of the sleeper's face : and clapped a hand upon her mouth.

Here before her, she perceived, lay a tragedy—due to *her* laxity, since the key that night at least, should have been removed ; wherefore her dimples vanished : for that this event must become known, if the girls remained, was certain ; and, after many trepidations, she determined that their escape would be the lesser of her two ruins.

Accordingly, when at noon the two prisoners were led down they presently found that the portal was open ; and Bessie, catching Laura by the hand, with what strength remained to her ran from that place.

South-eastward across barren fields ; past the Stews ; into Southwark High-street, and up it ; till, at a sombrous archway, Bessie said " Wait here "—the manner of the elder sister now irresistibly authoritative : and this day, to her heart, Laura feared and shrank from her, almost as from some risen spirit, or superior essence.

The arch was some steps only from that carved frontage,

and barge-board roofs, and gables, of Chaucer's Tabard Inn ; and under those hoary pendants and quaint finials Bessie disappeared.

She would speak with mine host in private ; and for ten minutes spoke, part of that time on her knees : after which she ran back for Laura, and the two followed the good man to a gable-garret overlooking the street, he having promised her silence and hiding. After locking the door upon herself, she sat waiting for night.

Save those two words " Wait here ", she had uttered nothing that day to Laura ; and now, too, they sat dumb, dim-lit under the rude roof, Laura Ford slinking mouse-still, dreading to make a sound, or move her foot, Bessie waiting for darkness : her one hope now being to get Alvarada's twenty-seven thousand rose-nobles from the Bell Inn, find Mark Bonner—and die.

So after curfew she went out, locking the door upon Laura, passed, at the inn's back, over Bankside, took ferry-boat to some stairs near Old Scotland Yard, and passed through Holbein's gate by the Tower at Charing Cross into the Strandfields, going a lonely and lowly pilgrim, not seeming great nor momentous, her plait reaching no lower than the rowan-tree necklace round her low-clad neck Next, crossing the Fleet bridge, she passed through the Lud gate ; and at the Bell Inn went down a side-passage to enter the courtyard at the back, where mine host himself, her mother's uncle, opened to her knock at a buttery door ; and wide were his eyes : " Bessie Ford ! . . . And many a searching of heart has been mine these weeks for thy mother's child. Wherefore leaved'st me, girl, without congee or farewell-word ? "

" By my credit, Master Somers, that were long in the telling, sir . . . Prithee, let me sit here a little ".

" Art sick, girl ? "

" Not so quick and hearty as I have been, sir ".

" Goes all not well with thee, Bessie Ford ? "

" Not all, Master Somers, sir ".

She had lowered herself to a stool, while he, with parted legs and round blue eyes, stood regarding her. After a minute she presented him Alvarada's wyvern.

" The Spaniard's pledge ! " cried he.

" The coffre-fort is mine, Master Somers, if you will deliver it me ".

Somewhat askance he eyed her, hesitated, moved thrice through the room, while she explained—and there was need for haste : for one no less than the Queen of England was at that moment hasting in a closed whirlcote eastward to seize this very coffre-fort of Alvarada.

However, as there was no gainsaying the Spaniard's pledge, mine host finally led the way upward ; and in Alvarada's once bed-chamber he dived into a chest, to produce an iron box, green-painted and massive : whereupon Bessie put-in the key ; and now before her lay gold-pieces thick as flakes and wafers.

" Heaven's mercy, here's riches ! " breathed Somers ; " girl, girl——"

" Master Somers ", she said, " you are parent of mine on the mother's side, and, to boot, my good friend : so in this matter, I wot, you will even help me ; all this wealth you here see is verily mine , but bear it about with me I cannot : what, then, must I do, sir ? "

" Why, Bessie, here thou mightest leave it to use as thou hast need ".

" Nay, Master Somers, for myself this mass of lucre were useless, in sooth : for my case is even this, that I have an ailing, sir, and an aching, that within brief space must take me from this world somehow, someways. But you know that I have a little sister, and her I hope to get married before I go hence, if, sir, I can but find the bridegroom for her. And for her and him I want to lay up the money in some ceremony-place, whence they could withdraw it——"

" Why, then, a banker of Lombard Street would do thy affair, girl ".

" Of Lombard Street—a banker. Why, yes, sir, there you

just hit my meaning ; and, since I do not wish to be in the streets by day, would you, Master Somers, commit the money to the banker's hand in my stead, laying afterwards in my hand his acknowledgment ? "

" Why, that will I. When do I see thee again, then ? "

" In two days—three—if come I can : for my way is hard beset. If I cannot come——"

" Where bidest thou ? "

" Oh, 'tis secret, Master Somers ! If I tell you——"

" By bread and salt, with me 'twere as secret as the grave ".

" We bide at The Tabard, sir, in Southwark. If I come not back to you within nine days, you will fetch to me there the acknowledgment, asking after me in the name of Stanley ".

" Fair and good, that will I. But, Bessie Ford, what is this talk of aching and ailing and dying, girl ? A young sprig like thee, now——"

But he stopped agape, for the taper's glare touching her face boldly at the moment showed him an ineffable face, elfin as lightning, stiff with the white austerity of iron at crucifixion and cry-of-death survived, like the risen Christ's.

She now took from the box three of the coins, and not until she was on the point of closing it noticed that in a corner of it was a smaller box, half-hidden by the coins : so she raised the lid of this, and, seeing some papers which she divined to be private papers of Alvarada's, put them into her hip-pouch, locked the coffre-fort, and handed the key to her uncle, who touched her with a kiss of reverence on each cold cheek, as she went away.

Still on eastward she moved now through a London in moonlight, hugging each shadow, till she got to the Tower, to the cubical erection on the Place of Execution, and beyond Great Tower Hill to the Postern Gate : whence some paces northward brought her to Alhallows Church, Barking, and so on to the Crutched Friars, where she passed down an alley to the bell-cot of the gate-house at

the south-east, the friary-bell now calling forlorn, monotonous, to compline ; and at the bell-cot she rang, leant weary upon the portal till the door-keeper brother came peering, told him that she craved to have speech with Brother Bruno, and now was taken down the burial-ground path to the friary-parlour, where she remained seated on a stone bench, till Bruno, called from the garth, came heaving his cartload of carcass past the south transept, along the east cloister, by slype and chapter, to the parlour ; and with a hand on her head, he said, asthmatic : " Now, what hast thou ? "

" Could you tell me, sir, where Master Calvo is now ? "

" Not I, no. He suddenly left the Bridge—by'r Lady, not I, no ".

" Oh, could you not tell me, sir ? " cried Bessie Ford.

Her hope was that both Calvo and Bonner had come back to London : for in that case Calvo would be aware of the whereabouts of Bonner, his disciple, her one plan of finding Bonner lying in her finding of Calvo—unless by chance Bonner was back at his former lodging, an improbable thing, since Bonner flitted fortnightly for lack of cash.

" I thought you would know, sir . . . being such a friend of Master Calvo ".

" Not I, no, not I. Hast thou done ? "—sheering off, thinking little of her, thinking much of supper and monastery-routines.

" I had also to pray you, sir "—she followed after him—" that you do the needful offices for the speedy marriage of my sister, Laura Ford, with Mark Bonner—say the morrow, or the morrow after—I offering a donation of fifteen rose-nobles for the prior's camera, and fifteen more for a mass ".

Brother Bruno started at this ! " Why, thou ? " said he. " Fifteen *plus* fifteen is twenty—twenty-five—*thirty* ! Yes. Whence——?

" I have it, sir : little it tides whence ".

" And the names ? "

" Laura Ford——"

" Ford, yes ".

" And Mark Bonner ".

" Bonner, yes ".

" All will be preste and ready, sir, whenever I come ? "

" All, yes ".

The bell's forlorn calling halted, Bruno hurried away, and Bessie set out to retrace her steps to Southwark.

But at this very time Queen Katherine in person was alighting in a flurry at The Bell Inn : for only one hour since had she heard at Bridewell of the death of Alvarada from Sir John Perrott, just arrived with many a scar and bandage ; and, hearing, she had wept ; but then with a start of scare had her tears been arrested, she exclaiming : " But—did you not find on his body a key and wyvern ? "

" No such thing ", had said Sir John, and the Queen had nearly fainted : for she well knew, since Alvarada had told her, that in his coffre-fort were documents, evidences of Henry's frailties, letters of Katherine herself to Charles, scratched off in hours of passion : which letters, now that she had a prospect of winning Henry back from Anne Boleyn, she would not, for a kingdom, have reach their destination : for, once seen either by the English or the Spanish King, they must result in conflagration, perhaps in the consummation of that thing whose name had already been whispered and written—Divorce.

So she tossed round her head a thick veil, and with Sir John and six attendants was now about to set out for The Bell, when Anne Boleyn ran down to the palace-hall, to whisper to Flying Sidney, who, having accompanied her return to Court, lolled idly there among retainers : " You see the Queen's whirlcote—follow, Sidney ! and give me in my bed-chamber to-night whither it goes ! "

And Sidney, following on his fleet feet, saw it stop at The Bell Inn.

Here old Somers, trembling, confronted by these visitors

whom he perceived to be great, dared not refuse to produce both coffre-fort and key : and the Queen fumbled with the key, got the coffre-fort open, tossed out the gold, groped, gave out a groan of failure, and fainted.

On which the fist of the ferocious Sir John went out to threaten Somers, whose knees were weak, as he flurried to seek water, muttering " Not a coin, not a coin, has been touched " ; but, even as he came back to dash her nose, the pale lady opened her eyes with the sigh : " Sir John Perrott, no hope ? "

" Why, yea, that ", answered Sir John : " let us question our good man here, and, look thee, Master Host, answer as thou lovest thy skin's entirety : who was't, as thou sayest, opened this box but now ? "

" Even my niece, Bessie Ford ".

" How ! the beauty's good sister ? " asked the Queen, looking up with new interest : " and said she that she had the wyvern from the Count himself ? "

" In his dying hour, lady ".

" Why, how it was I see well now ! Won by the girl's virtuous behaviour, the kind soul would have left to her the gold here, while the dying head forgot the documents. But, Sir John, if the girls are indeed in the custody of my Lord King, how comes Bessie Ford to be here but now ? "

" She hath escaped, then ", said Sir John.

" But she will be recaptured, Sir John, by the King ! and with these papers on her body—God give me strength——"

" Marry, is the girl, then, a King's prisoner ? " asked Somers aghast ; adding : " Now I see light—for hence grew her strange talk of dying——! "

" Of what, sir ? " said the Queen.

" Of dying within few days, lady. For, ko she, ' An ailing have I, and an aching——' "

" Oh, here is worse and worse ! " ejaculated Katherine with clasped hands : " for this talk of dying, Sir John, is but a sign that, the King having performed his wicked will upon her sister, the poor child hath it now in mind to make

away with herself! and if she escape the King's recapture, still the writings may be found on her dead body, making my woe either way—ill-happed Queen and woman that I am this night!"

"And thou knowest not, mine host, the girl's lurking-place?" asked Sir John.

"Not I, my lord", replied Somers, scratching his head.

"But at least thou canst tell which way she passed hence, varlet!"

And now, after his effort of reticence, Somers, pressed, muttered: "Truth to tell, she said she was bound for the Crutched Friars——"

"How long since?"

"One half hour——"

"Sir John—after with speed!" screamed the Queen, whereupon Sir John, with three, dashed down to gallop eastward.

Now, Bessie Ford, on her homeward way, had nearly reached the great quadrangle of Leadenhall, when she was aware of the hoofs of Sir John approaching; and, suspicious as a bird, conceiving the world against and after her, she stopped scared, glanced about, and saw an open doorway, into which she pitched—the abode of a haberdasher of the Jewry, over whose doorway a lamp glowed: she was, therefore, seen to run, and Sir John gave out after her a roar of his gross throat.

But the horsemen, before they could halt, passed the doorway; and three, dismounted, were sprinting back to enter it, when Bessie, having found no hiding-place, darted out, like a hare started from cover, almost into their arms. Doubling, however, southward down a by-street, she summoned her every power, and was fleetly away, while behind her she could hear echoes of shouts and flying feet. Happily, this part of London was all a complexity of short steep streets, at present desert save for the night-watchman's lanthorn and trite tramping; but, in spite of her dodging agilities, they tracked her five long minutes, until, near

Billingsgate, she spied the arch of a yard, within which, bathed in moonlight, stood timber-stacks ; and, since her pursuers were now close, though hidden, she, bolting-in thither, hid in a nook black as ink betwixt two timber-stacks, her breast heaving in her labour to breathe.

Here she lost the pursuing echoes ; waited five minutes ; then flew out anew, thinking the timber too obvious a hiding-place ; and so came out, running, upon the river at Billingsgate, slipped with a cry footlong down three slimy steps, then on a strip of moonlit strand hid in blackness under a floor propped on piles, open to the flow of high tides.

But everywhere seemed to her moonlit and obvious : and, hearing anew echoes that flew, she, too, flew, westward now : until, emerging from a street upon Botolph's Wharf, she spurted far out to its end, then down five steps, and, balancing along a beam washed by tides, sat there in blackness among old bearded beams.

Sat there a long time, her buskins hanging in the tide, that flopped sloppily among the piles, and slobbered, blubbing sobs with a dumb tongue. Here were odours, dreams, suggestions. Some boats and barges lay by the wharf, and were at rest ; all was at rest : only, afar, the watchman's tread, which tolled . . .

Bessie let her hand hang in the water, lifted a little of it, let it trickle through her fingers . . .

But with a start she roused herself ; stole up and away : ran till she got to St. Magnus ; then, at a less guilty pace, crossed London Bridge ; and so, by the Bridge House, St. Mary Overie, Suffolk House, reached The Tabard after midnight.

CHAPTER XLI

ROUND THE STONE THE CIRCLES SPREAD

> Eager ambition's fiery chase I see ;
> I see the circling haunt of noisy men,
> Pursuing and pursued, each other's prey. *Young.*

During those days Anne Boleyn, knowing that the fate of her ambition was being worked out, lived on a tip-toe of activity, and even while the Queen was sighing ineffectually at The Bell Inn, was eagerly intriguing with Brandon, whom she had summoned from Westminster to a rendezvous in a little room opening upon the close of the Bridewell Palace.

And " Charles ", says she, " you no longer please me ; and you should, for I mean to be your Queen ".

Whereat Brandon, a gallant with languid blue eyes, which yet could be shrewd and hard, stretched his legs, and, throwing a tired glance aside at her, replied : " You are already my Queen, dear Anne ".

" Nay, but I mean really, Charles : a Queen at which you will bow, and not yawn, wot you ? "

" Royal little woman "—drawing his hand down her face, for long agone she had granted him these her easy favours.

" Only fools are modest, Charles : and am I so overconfident ? Doth not my little star twinkle crisp and knowingly ? Laura Ford is in Henry's hands ! "

" Well, what of that ? "

" Never yet was male man who could see, I swear ! except that thing they call Thomas Wolsey. Laura Ford in Henry's hands meaneth sure and certain return of Henry's longing for me day after the morrow, without fault ! "

" You make me jealous of my King, Anne. But art so sure ? "

" Is not my sister the King's paramour, ninny ? From her alone I'd know Henry of England. Possession for him meaneth instant surfeit, his whim unfinished a latent flame ".

Brandon patted a yawn. " I suppose you are right. Abstract thinking bothers, Anne. Women are made to think for men, and men to think of women. But, being so sure, what more would'st have ? "

" You know ! you feign the imbecile ! There is always the eternal Wolsey against me ".

" I hate Wolsey : talk not of him ".

" But because I hate him, therefore I talk, talk, talk, of him, till I do pierce and slay him with my tongue's tip ! "

" Then, o' God's name, talk of him, I care not : though I have known thy tongue's tip pierce and yet not slay, sweet Anne——"

" It will slay *thee*, and yet not pierce, if thou palterest when I bespeak thee at the pitch and acme of seriousness. Listen—there remains *Wolsey* ! Before thy poor friend can touch greatness, Wolsey must lose credit, hope, estate ; and 'tis not so hard, I swear to heaven, Charles Brandon ! He hath his weak spot—his Spain. And because he would have the friendship of Spain and Pope, therefore hate I both Spain and Pope, and would court their enmity ".

" Enmity of Spain ", Brandon said deliberately, " means union of France and Spain against England, Anne ".

" I know it, and I care not ! "

" A sorry patriot thou, Anne, Anne ".

" But an egregious Boleynist, Charlie. Are you not with me, Charles Brandon ? "

" I am always with thee, Anne. But I confess to a sort of scurvy liking for England also ".

" Oh, England is all right ! " Anne snapped thumb and finger : " countries take care of themselves. But you perceive, don't you, that there must be a *row*, Charles, between Henry and Spain, before he can be led to the definite point

of Divorce ? And this row I have it in my hands to make —if you would but help me ! for the King's letter to Wolsey, in which is that very word ' Divorce ', lies now in the bosom of Bessie Ford ; and you know where her abode is, and this week gone have I prayed and prayed you therefor, yet have it not ! Charles, *where* are the sisters ? "

" No, that I tell not, Anne ".

" Charles, *tell* me ! I'll give thee——"

" No, 'tis the King's secret, pretty ".

" But, ninny, am I not on the King's side in this matter ? What a thing is a male man ! What harm ? *Tell* me ". She pressed his hand.

" No, I could not ".

" Then, keep thy stupid secret, and I will make thee suffer. But tell me this : Has the King yet gone ? "

" Yester midnight ".

" And has he revisited the girl to-day ? "

" No ".

" What, so soon distasted ? Ha ! ha ! But, Charles, now is thy chance to visit the hiding-place, and have the letter from the wench. Promise ! To-night ? Oh, promise ! I will do for thee what thou darest not hope—Dost promise, then ? For thy love of me, for thy hate of Wolsey ! "

" Well, I promise "—he rose : having as yet no knowledge of the sisters' escape.

An hour later Anne had from Flying Sidney tidings of the Queen's visit to The Bell Inn ; and, stealing from the sleeping palace, she made her way eastward, accompanied only by Sidney, who roused The Bell landlord about midnight.

Plying old Somers with gold, she got from him the story of the documents, of the Queen's fainting agitations, and, most momentous of all, of Bessie Ford's talk of death. Only, the old man kept in his bosom that word : The Tabard Inn.

And now Anne, who had often invoked the death of Bessie Ford, with her soul's whole hope desired her life, divining, like the Queen, that this talk of death portended

suicide, and perceiving that suicide meant the loss, or the falling into wrong hands, of both the king's letter and the Alvarada documents.

Quickly on getting back to the palace she sent Sidney packing with a letter to Du Ballay's palace, standing near in fields between Rolls Place and Fetter Lane, which consisted then of six houses : the political friendship between him and Anne being based upon the fact that the aim of both was the alienation of Spain from England (though *he* had the ulterior aim of a league of Spain and France against England).

So, the morning after, Du Ballay, still stiff with wounds, stood awaiting her betwixt two ivied side-buttresses of St. Bartholomew the Great, where Anne that matins gravely attended mass : and soon she appeared at full speed, her large-kerchiefed bosom aheave, her back balanced far forward on her haunch, plumb as a water-carrier's, her veil slightly raised to her nose-tip to show her fleshly smile, above being some scratches of Bessie Ford's hand ; and instantly with gossipy volubility she began to chatter : " My lord Bishop—others are with me—in the church—we make hasty conference—one half minute ! Tell me, my lord, yea or nay—*is* Francis in London ? "

" *Must* I say ? " smiled the French Ambassador.

" But yea ! Are we not allies ? "

" He is, then ".

" I thought so. Then, my lord, will you whisper him that within the breast of Bessie Ford this moment rests a letter of strong unfriendliness to Spain and the Queen, writ by Henry's hand ; also some documents of Alvarada, at whose loss the Queen swoons, I swear, like a yawsey hen. Tell him, my lord Bishop, that Bessie Ford has escaped from Henry ; that she—momently, my lord—plans her own death ; that, if he loves his hopes, if he detests Henry, he must unearth the girl before her death, or her recapture by Henry, or her capture by Katherine, who also, this very day, be certain, will be hunting through London after her.

Oh, my lord Bishop, be prompt and urgent, I implore ! You yourself will search for the girl—and I—and Francis above all—I have done——"

She awaited no answer, but ran with raised skirts her tom-boy run back into the church, which in some minutes she was urging her companions-of-ceremony to quit.

Then back to the palace ; and, as she was passing through the palace fore-court, Sidney whispered her : " Charles Brandon awaits you in the vestibule of your withdrawing-room . . ." So thither she hied up—without inquietude, expecting only that Brandon had come with the stale tidings of Bessie Ford's escape : but he had other tidings.

For, on learning at Rain House from the pinked porringer the tale of the girls' escape, he had guessed a mystery : so, with his sword at the woman's breast, he had forced from her a confession of Bessie Ford's immolation of her maidenhood : and " Anne ", said he brusquely, on Anne's entrance, " the girls have escaped ".

" You are nine months late, Charles "—unpinning her cap—" as when Lady Westcott married on the day of her first-born's birth ".

" Oh, you knew. But this you know not, Anne—Bessie Ford has cheated the King, and Laura gone like morning lark ".

Now she frowned, paled, heaved the bosom, breathing : " What say you ? "

He explained ; and, as he explained, all her complexion perished away from her flesh, while she swayed as if to fall, sighing : " This, then, explains the threatened suicide . . . ! "

A moment more and she was down on her knees before Charles Brandon, smoothing his hands, down and down. " Charles ! knows the King as yet ? "

" No ".

" Then, Charles, you will not be *telling* him ! All, all, all, were to re-commence again, if you do ! for he will love this Laura more crazy than ever—for me, Charles, do it not ! Look you, that Bessie Ford has in her bosom letters of the

Queen to the Emperor, as well as Henry's to Wolsey, which I have but now told Francis of: Francis will be seeking, and more likely finding, the girl than Henry, and if Henry have not Laura——"

She was interrupted by Brandon, whose face had flushed. "What! is Francis in London?"

"He is," answered Anne, and immediately repented, for Brandon stamped, crying out: "'Tis insolence! this is not his country, the black goat! Wherefore goes he not back to his own country to play his japes there! Henry will dash into a pretty passion when he hears of this—— !"

She smoothed his hands, down and down. "But, Charles, you will not *tell* him this—for me!"

"Tell him I *will*!"

"Oh, addle-pated male! But of Bessie Ford's act—you will not tell him, Charles? Oh, you dream not of what I will *do* for you! Promise, dear, dear Charles!"

"As to Bess? Well, I know not. God! grand girl that—a grand, gallant, all-achieving creature. Just think of it, Anne! What a superb thing!"

"Superb fiddlesticks! Will you *promise*——?"

"Wot you, Anne? you'd swear that 'tis Bess, not Laura, with which Henry is in love, if you heard him these days! For myself, I swear I have half a thought to search the girl out and marry her—I were capable of it!"

"Capable of devil's frenzy, Charles Brandon! Listen to me: will you promise . . . ?"

"I'll consider it".

"Promise".

But he would not; and the same day, in telling Henry of Francis' presence in London, he told all: of Bessie's act and sacrifice; of the documents which she carried; of the probable suicide.

And the effect upon Henry was astonishing: for first he chuckled with a certain shyness of the eyes, then was sullen, then, touched to the nerve at what had been done and suffered, she not counting her life dear to her, he cast

his arms upon a table, and was shaken with the sobbings of a strong man's compassion.

And she would die, he gleaned . . . That very hour he had twenty seekers hunting through London for her.

An hour afterwards Wolsey knew all from Knevet, whom Brandon had told. And by evening-Angelus Wolsey, tremulous to have those papers in his possession, had some score of men hunting through London for Bessie Ford.

Thus the quest of Laura had ceased ; the quest of Bessie begun.

Anne, meanwhile, had written to Du Ballay a spurring letter, explaining the motive of Bessie Ford for her (supposed) purpose of self-destruction, and the urgency of the case : and Du Ballay galloped through Bishop's Gate with the news to Francis.

The French King, in listening to what had been done to his little friend of the forest, uttered not a sound ; but, profoundly moved, threw a tear from his eye ; and, rising soon afterwards from his seat, heaved up his arm, to growl with a deep frown : " Now, may the great God who governeth in Heaven grant me strength to avenge this most ugly, crying, and gross crime ! "

By compline, including men sent out by the Queen, Anne, Du Ballay, there were some seventy persons engaged in the search for Bessie ; many, from Chelsea to the Tower, keeping watch in line by the riverside to guard against the expected suicide.

CHAPTER XLII

FRANCIS AND CALVO

The household of continuance . . . *Howard.*

Francis had no knowledge that the skull-capped man whom, as the companion of the two fugitives, he had sought through Hampshire, was the alchemist, Mauro Calvo, whom he knew ; but had thought that the sage was in London, and genuinely by the light of his " science " had sent him news of the beauty.

And soon, on learning the news of poor Bessie Ford, of her act, her impending death, there occurred in his head, urged to invent, a thought of Calvo.

An hour, his arms folded over his chest, he paced about his chambers, and " Poor Minerva ", he mournfully murmured, " how have the fates and the powers conspired upon thee, and storms foundered thy tiny bark ! To die ! Yet ' Ill were it to me to die ', quoth she in the wood that day . . . Yes, that day ! with what a prettiness of simplicity she trusted Francis of France ! rotten old Francis : then and since. And what now for her can Francis do ? Even as I dally here she may be tasting the last bitterness of death ; and ' Ill, by my credit ', quoth she, ' were it to me . . . ' Faith, what a day was that ! appearing to my fantasy the sole holy day of my life. Aye, there beneath the tree I lay, my head on Minerva's lap ; and 'tis wholly like a dream of blessedness, the brook, the breezes, the tree's movement, my musing doze, and the fugitive girl whose words will for ever infect my recollection. Calvo ! yes—I will find out the seer's retreat, and invoke his science to her discovery ".

To discover Calvo's former abode was not difficult, for London knew it ; but, on learning it, Francis learned also

that the seer had left it ; and now his mind was left deviceless.

But his necessity for action was absolute : and that night late, being on the Bridge at the spot described as Calvo's den, he entered the house-passage and jolted his body down the back stair, though now without hope.

But behind the portal upon which he butted, he heard movements ; when he knocked the door opened ; and he saw before him the skull-cap, the bulky brow, the tumble-down eyes, that he knew.

In fact, Calvo had decided that the place from which he had been driven was precisely the place of tranquillity and hiding ; not that he was any longer in pressing dread of disturbance : for he now bore on a finger an intaglio of a biretta—a ring of his new protector, Wolsey.

The sage started, as Francis with a laugh raised his mask, showed the dark face, and walked in.

" You knew not that I was in this city, I perceive, Signior Calvo ", said Francis.

Calvo coughed a little. " I—divined it, Sire ; but your visit, I admit, startled me. Pray seat yourself on this little stool ".

" Pest ! your workshop stinks like a badger's burrow, Signior ".

" 'Tis the odour of Knowledge, Sire : in the mouth 'tis bitter, but in the belly sweet ".

" Well said. Now, I come to test and consult your science. Your letter with regard to the lovely, gracious, and amiable damsel, Laura Ford, I had ; and came, as you must know, to England in her quest. La, in this I failed : the King of England hath captured them—her and a sister, Bessie. But they yesterday escaped him ; and this Bessie, in particular, I now seek ; I seek her keenly : I think I would resign, Signior Calvo, five years' revenue of my kingdom to find her. I seek her for her own sake ; I seek her for the sake of certain most momentous State-papers which she is said to bear about ; but chiefly I seek

her for her own sake. Can you, Calvo, reveal me where she is—yea or nay ? "

On which Calvo, wholly charlatan at the spur and surprise of the moment, possessed by vanity, answered : " Why, yea—I hope it ".

" Well said ; very well said : and—when ? "

" I must first consult, and work, and elaborate ".

" Consult—work—and elaborate. I see. Then—I wait. My abode is the Grey House, outside Bishop's Gate, by Saint Botolph. There will I await your news. La, do this, and your guerdon shall be what you wish. Only—be speedy, be speedy : she meditates suicide ".

" Who ? "

" The girl—Bessie ".

" Suicide ? "

" La, I fear ".

" But you said, Sire, that she has escaped the King ? Surely you said that, Sire ! "

" I did, yes. But a most foul outrage has been accomplished upon her——"

" Upon *Bessie* ? "

" Yes. By Henry ".

The sage could scarcely veil his agitation. " Good God ! " came from him.

" Had you no hint or intimation of her fate from your science ? " enquired Francis.

" Science ? Oh, I see your meaning—none, none—that is to say, a vague indication I may have had anent a parent of the maid with the face——"

" Well, I say you *bonsoir* ", said the King, rising in haste ; " and speedy success in your vigils, Signior Calvo ".

Upon which his lean body fumbled its way up the steps, and did not reach bed until four o'clock lauds were chaunting in all the convents, and some daubs of dawn smeared the east.

CHAPTER XLVIII

ANNE'S HINT

Ea serpentium populatur ova, gratissimamque ex his escam nidis suis refert. *Solinus.*

Left alone, the sage propped his brow at his table, and so during a long time mused, while something which stewed shouted and fussed over, unnoticed.

He had abandoned her, and she had been caught ; had suffered wrong. " Master Calvo, sir, you abandon me ! " —that call he heard again.

Still, Francis' tale was rather incredible—he hardly believed . . .

" Well, well ", he sighed, rousing himself to rush now to the shouting brew. But that night he could not work, threw round him a cloak with a capote, hiding his face, and went out—to The Bell Inn, where, in an interview with the old Somers, he played the wizard, and so won the story of Bessie's visit. But Somers kept that secret—The Tabard Inn.

Thence Calvo walked westward to Almoner's Yard, where he was aware that Bonner grubbed in a garret with Fitzgerald ; and, having summoned down Bonner, he said to him : " Bessie Ford has escaped from the King, and has been to her uncle. Where she is now he vows that he knows not ; but know he doth, and either will pass to her or she to him, he having in his custody a lump of money bequeathed her, says he, by some Spanish champion. So you, Mark, and this Fitzgerald, by turns, will watch from some coign The Bell exits and entrances every second of every day ".

" My troth, Fitz will even jump for joy ! " cried Bonner.

" Ah . . . let us hope it. Go now, one or other of you, to The Bell ; and come to see me every day ".

Then the sage paced home to a troubled bed ; and Bonner that night watched The Bell.

But the watch, maintained for eight days, resulted in nothing . . . For Bessie did not go to Somers for the banker's acknowledgment, the chase by Sir John Perrott on her very first going out having scared her ; and daily from her landlord when he tapped at her door she had tales of many men who, in the tavern-room, demanded news of two maidens.

As the days slipped by, hope in the business that remained to her to do forsook her, for where to discover Bonner she knew not at all, since of Calvo's whereabouts she knew nothing, and Bonner was not at his former lodging. Through the days a lethargy possessed her, she sitting grumpy, still, hugging herself like one suffering from chill ; while Laura, mouse-soundless always, regarded her guiltily, as one might regard with interest the doings of a ghost.

Only toward midnight would Bessie go out a little, slinkingly to the back-court, and so out upon Bankside, where, a stone's-throw from the tavern, lay a frog-pond, stagnant and green, watched by three ragged willows : and here, for hours, down at the very water's edge, would she crouch, and pore, and gloat.

Indeed, since that evening when, under Botolph's Wharf, she had soaked her buskins in the river-water, a sinister fascination for water-sides, for the sight, the neighbourhood of *water*, had developed in her into a kind of hydrophilia : so that Laura, who furtively eyed her every stirring, and observed that from these excursions she returned haggard, her buskins soaked, her clothes bedraggled, got the notion of horror that one night, having gone, she might never come back.

For here was not the intellect of a modern college-girl, who, having done such an act, would see that the act itself

was of no importance, being ennobled by its motive ; but the ancients, like the Chinese who revere them, had the mentation of the child : the act—the dogma—apart from reason—being then the point : so that that staid maid saw "Polluted" branded across her brow in characters of shocking crimson ; and the river-slush had become her lover.

She, poor girl, did not even see the weak place in her hope of resting yet some days at The Tabard, being incapable at present of connected reflection : for on the ninth day the old Somers was to come to her, as she had told him to, with the banker's acknowledgment, and old Somers was being strictly watched by five or six, each of her seekers reasoning that, if she had gone once to The Bell, she might go again.

And toward evening-Angelus of the ninth day Somers, setting out, made straight across the Bridge for The Tabard, stolidly unconscious of the watchers who at different distances loitered before and behind him. Two had risen from The Bell bar-parlour on his departure ; two had run down from windows opposite the inn ; Bonner had followed from the shade of a manger-arch : all saw him enter The Tabard.

When they, too, entered, and Somers was not visible, the inference was not obscure : Somers was with his niece.

And now the spies, one after the other, with all their hearts, raced their various ways—to Henry, to Francis, to Wolsey, to Du Ballay, to Anne, to Katherine, to Fitzgerald.

Bonner, the foremost of them to bolt out of the inn, had noted the odd number of men who entered The Tabard in that minute : so, as he pitched toward the Bridge down Southwark High Street, spying a one-stirruped butcher-boy's nag standing with abandoned saddle, he was not slack to gambol to its back, dig heel to rib, and gallop.

And, in fact, he reached the wool-market and Fitzgerald some minutes ere the nearest of the seekers had received the news, their spies reaching Anne, Katherine, and Du

Ballay's palace at nearly the same time ; but Du Ballay was at court at Westminster ; and Anne and Katherine, radiant at the discovery, each believing herself alone in the secret, lost something like an hour without action, Anne at this very hour having to keep a rendezvous with Brandon. As for Henry, Wolsey, and Francis, they were at equal distances from The Tabard ; but Wolsey was at vespers at St. Margaret's : so the race lay between Francis, Henry, and Fitzgerald.

Fitz had that instant awaked from a brief sleep, when Bonner panted in with the tale of it : and he had hardly heard half the passion of words, when he was spurting down the stair with his jerkin half-on, like one who, dashing to fight, half jerks off his jacket ; and, seeing at the bottom the butcher-boy's nag, he tossed a leg over it ; but when his toes touched ground, and he felt the nag throe indistinctly under him in a kick-out, he slid off, and flew afoot toward the river.

Now, hard by the Gate House of Old Palace Yard there stood in an angle of the wall a street-pulpit of lovely marble, corbel and crocket, flute and fruit, a cornucopia of sculpture, from which an Austin friar was even now preaching a succession of jests to a little crowd of titterers and jeerers ; and saith he : " But to leave laughing, my sons, and to come to what is rather matter for tears—for tears follow upon laughter as a wroth husband upon a bussed wife, or as scurvy Monday morning upon jolly Sunday night——"

" Bah ! " called out Charles Brandon from the crowd, " since thy laughter maketh us weep, good friar, thy tears will but make us laugh ".

" Now, here have you a Corinthian ", exclaimed the friar, " which, an I mistake not, is that very scion of the Brandons which——"

" Come, no more ", said Brandon to two young gentlemen of the King's Bed-chamber who, with him, had stopped to hear the friar's jibes ; " no more—I have a rendezvous ".

" Near ? "

"Just here"—now he put lips to ear, whispering: "*Anne!*"

But now he started, and with quick breath hissed close: "There—there—is the knave Fitzgerald! Quick!—we have him—Henry would be hanging him—— !"

Fitz was running at the moment through the Gate into Palace Yard to gain the King's Stairs and the ferry there: and the three, after him, were so close upon him in the yard before Brandon cried, "Halt, fellow!", that Fitz had hardly time to stop, draw, twist to guard, when he was faced by the three nimble blades.

There are, however, times when the spirit rises easily above material obstruction; and now Fitz, lightly crying "Why, sirs, look out for your pates, then!" began to ply and operate.

The Yard, a desert, echoed the shuffling shoe-soles and mixing swords, as Fitzgerald thrice shifted his ground, retreating each time; but the third time he had the three rapiers in the position which his fencing had designed for each: and one he sent wheeling five feet high with the hand that had held it, parried the second, struck downward the third, receiving a cut in the thigh—all in one movement of his sword. Yet an instant, and he had the second of Brandon's friends spitted through the neck, and, springing backward, cried to Brandon "You yield?" but Brandon, a famed swordsman, came on: so the two edges, edge on edge, jostled with slides and stoppages, until Brandon's wrist gave with a jerk to the urgency of Fitzgerald's blade, whereupon the gallant sighed, staggered backward with uplifted sword-arm, and dropped promptly upon the paving-stones, well ripped in the breast.

Fitzgerald was now about to hasten away when there came a lady peering with dainty steps nearer to the pierced gallant's faintly-smiling agony—Anne came to her meeting with Brandon: and, giving out a cry, as she recognised Brandon, and at the same time recognised Fitzgerald, she ran to bend over Brandon; but then, with a flush of rage

against this champion of Bessie Ford, turned to touch his shoulder, as he moved off, saying to him : " Master Fitzgerald, will you, then, kill all one's friends with this your sword ? And always for the cause of the same fantasy ? Is it that you still seek Bessie Ford ? Spare yourself and desist, if you take my hint. She is at this instant the King's mistress—*Bessie*, not the sister ".

Hearing the phrases, but scarcely with realisation, he frowned a moment at her, muttering something ; then ran —had no time . . .

But at the King's Stairs he saw the boat half-way over, going : and had to wait eight minutes . . .

A singular sickness took him : so that during the row across he bent over the boat's beam and vomited : owing, may-be, to his wound, or to the wound of a woman's tongue . . .

On the other side he set off running toward The Tabard across Bankside ; but by this time he was miles late.

CHAPTER XLIV

AT THE TABARD

But wae the thane which bears the bane
O' waeful maiden wronged. *Old Ballad.*

The first in fact to arrive at The Tabard was Henry, who, at the tidings, had dashed from a sitting of Council, and, encountering Thomas Howard waiting in the lobby of the Chamber, had, with him alone, taken boat at the Palace Stairs, both disguised, to land at Stangate Horse-Ferry on the other side and enter the tavern-yard at the back. There, Howard having bounded in to call the landlord, mine host came out, the gloaming now darkening, and the yard, not large, made gloomy by the sheer eaves of mangers and outhouses ; and Henry said : " I require thee instantly to give me up the two girls ".

Some tone in that command abashed mine host, but he murmured : " Girls, my master ? "

" Come, addlepate ", said Henry, and raised his mask a moment ; on which mine host agitatedly led the way upward, tapped the arranged tap at a wry-hanging door ; and when Bessie opened Henry and Howard entered.

Here it was so dark, that for some time they could not see, until Henry's eyes descried that Bessie Ford stood drawn up to her height as far as could be from him against the one perpendicular wall, gripping Laura by the arm. As he lifted his mask, she had an instant of the intenser pallor of death ; but it passed ; her neck was erect.

Henry said : " So, mamie, thou rannest away from me ? "

There was no reply, and he waited some moments, while Laura Ford's head hung, and her heart smote thickly, thinking that he spoke to her ; but it was to Bess : for here so simple a thing as the dimness of the garret abolished

Laura, but could subtract naught from Bessie's strength and entity.

And now Henry, with a leaning head of wheedling : " I fear me, alas, that I am fallen into the bad graces of mamie. Stands it not so ? "

No answer.

" Tell me, now ".

No answer.

" Well, thou wilt not be gracious, then, although thou seest I come pilgrim and penitent. 'Faith, sweetheart, I grieve for thee, and have grieved ; and, taking all into consideration, I praise thee, Bess, I rate thee at brighter price than I may say. Come, now, I have said, and we are friends again. Speak to me—stands it not so ? "

No answer.

" Why, then, I am in thy bad graces, in good truth. Is it that thou hast yet fear for the sis ? Nay, but have it no more : for even as Christ offered once for all an all-sufficient sacrifice in our stead, so, credit me, hast thou for this the sis. Henceforth she is safe from me, and from all : I myself will be her protector ".

Now Bess was moved to speech. " *You ?* "

" Why, even I ".

" Now, may every saint forefend ! "

" Ah, thou seest, thou keepest bile, thou keepest bile ! "

" Sir, since you come here with soft words, I pray you tell me wherefore. My sister, you say, you would no more molest. Then, what have you with me ? "

" Now would I be thy father, mamie, in every good office——"

" Father and ravisher in one were ill mixing ! " she venomously mentioned.

" Ha ! thy tongue can bite, then, girl. Yet but once have I wronged thee, and hath not Christ bidden forgiveness until seventy times——? "

Here Thomas Howard tittered, at " seventy times "; and Henry, spinning round, cried " Silence, Howard ! ", even

as Bessie Ford sighed " Oh, talk not of Christ with your tongue, sir . . . ! "

" Aha ! now thou showest open naughtiness. Yet, I vow, I pardon thee, knowing that the parts of all noble valour are in thee, girl. And, spite of thyself, I will be to thee what I have said, thy very friend. Thy sister, I swear, I wed to one of my own gentlemen, and thyself I raise eminent among the great of this land——"

Bessie Ford interrupted him with a crying : " Oh, cannot you let me die in peace ? Oh, pray, let me be ! Let me be ! "

" As to that, no ! " said Henry : " thou comest now with me ".

Upon which she left her place by the wall to fall upon her knees at his feet with beseeching palms. " Pity me—if but for what I have been to you—— ! "

But he took her hands, kissed them, lifted her by force, with " Come, come, Bessie ".

And there was no resisting : all passed out of the apartment, she with a rigid visage and parched eyes, down to a landing, where, some light from a casement suddenly revealing Laura, Henry was overwhelmed afresh by her face : and he started, with the breath : " Christ ! 'tis a luscious chunk . . . "

But now, when they had half-descended the back-stair, they were aware of an altercation below betwixt a man and mine host, who sought to bar his passage, the stranger's voice shrilly raised ; and the instant that Henry heard it he turned pale.

A moment more and his face rushed to ruddy rage, his sword rushing out, while " Back to thy chamber, and there await ! " he whispered quick to Bessie, and quick to Howard " The goat below ! God's glory ! in my own capital city : we stick him now ! "—as down flew the two swords, so prone that Francis and d'Arcy, standing in the house-passage adjoining the back-door, had but the chance to pitch recoiling into the yard, d'Arcy pricked in the shoulder before he could draw.

But in another moment the four had sprung to guard,

Henry engaging Francis, Howard tackling d'Arcy, three working urgently, heavy Henry having his bottom-lip fixed between his teeth, only Francis simpering below his mask, parrying rather than attacking, his gawky daddy-legs skedaddling over half the yard in strategies of spasmodic rushes and manœuvrings. And presently his edge is fitted to the edge of Henry in a slippery wedlock ; one in-instant he grins with red-faced effort, and instantly simpers again—for now he would bring about a pretty thing, every incident, not of his own duel only, but of the other too, being noted by him : as Henry's sword slips sideways, and Henry's mask is spinning high, the blade of Francis without break of motion comes down upon Howard's nape, and Howard drops ; and now, seeing with his ears that d'Arcy is darting to his aid, Francis calls " Laisse ! laisse ! " : for alone he wishes to " quench quick " that heat before him, and to abash that bleeding face ; nor is it now difficult, for, Henry being demoralised by the snatch-away of his mask and the fall of Howard, with wilder and wilder urgency ply his *bottes* ; until Francis, with one chop, bangs his rapier to the earth, and sticks betwixt hip and rib. Henry staggered, and succumbed.

Not an instant tarried Francis now : in, past the land-lord, eager to get this time his little friend . . .

But, seizing her chance, Bessie had dashed down by the front out into the High-street, dragging Laura ; and wildly she went running north-eastward toward London Bridge, wildly, blindly . . .

She was at the Bridge House when she heard galloping hoofs behind, and doubled her gasping urgency, still dragging the other girl, who was much less swift. Whither to flee she knew not ; thought of Botolph's Wharf : but the hoofs (which, in fact, were but the hoofs of the butcher-boy's horse that had been seized by Bonner, and was now seeking its butcher-boy, who sought it), hunted nigh ; and she, catching sight of a doorway well known to her, doubled and dashed in—the doorway above Calvo's den.

After scuttling down the little stair to find a hiding-place in the dark down there, they sat and panted ; Laura began to sob ; and the thought that Calvo might be behind that dark door before them never entered their minds.

But at Laura's sobbing the door was drawn back ; they saw light ; a prying form was before them.

Bessie leaped at him with a sob in her ; and Calvo, pleased as Punch, touching her, patting her head, said " Well, well ".

Thus by what led her she was led to him.

CHAPTER XLV

CRUTCHED FRIARS

Whose yielded pride and proud submission,
Still dreading death, when she had markèd long,
Her heart gan melt in great compassion,
And drizzling tears did shed for pure affection. *Spencer.*

When Calvo told her that he knew where Mark Bonner was her heart knew ease. All that remained to her to do seemed easy now.

The sage gave them his chamber in the garret, manœuvring a narrow settee down the back stair for his own bed : which works accomplished, Laura complained of weariness, was led to sleep ; and for a long time in the den Bessie and Calvo conversed that night.

" Well, we have sought thee far and wide, girl ", said he.

" Me, sir ? "

" Thee in especial ".

" And who, sir ? "

" Francis for one, which is in London, has sought thee ; and because thou hast with thee certain papers, others among the great have sought thee ; also myself, Bonner, and Fitzgerald——"

" Master Fitzgerald, sir ? "

" Aye ".

" What would he with me, Master Calvo ? "—with eyes of apprehension.

" Why, hath he not sought us through all our Hampshire wanderings, since the day that thou confessed'st to him in Colnbrook Church ? and we, silly cattle, knew not that he was for us ! "

" But *wherefore* was he for us, Master Calvo ? "

" Why, if thou asked'st me, girl, I'd say he was mad in love with thee ".

" Oh, not with *me*, sir ! "

" Even with thee, Bess. Why, the gallant's physiognomy is gone haggard and hollow——"

The effect upon her of this was a very panting of terror ; she got up, with " I must go hence . . . ! "

" Why, what hast thou now ? " asked Calvo astonished.

" Sir, if that man come here and find me——"

" Well, what then ? "

Now she covered up her face, melting now at last for self-pity into weeping, with a thin wail of " Oh, God, something must be against me, sure. . . ."

He loved her ! glad tidings of great joy! but now about her brows, branded, flagrant, was the stigma of her ignominy. . .

And no prayers, no threats, of Calvo, no terrors for Laura, could any more hold her there ; when it was dark she went away, leaving Laura, having mentioned to Calvo a spot where she would meet Bonner the next evening.

When she had gone, Calvo stood a long time meditating, asking himself, " Can it be that the King has really done her hurt. . . .? " But he could not understand nor credit this, having already settled in himself that the " wrong " hinted at by Francis was improbable. " Not Bessie, surely ", he said, " but Laura, was what Henry was after . . ."

As for her, she sat shivering an hour that night under Botolph's Wharf ; later found an obscure lodging at a watchman's east of Billingsgate ; and resolved that no one —not Laura, nor Bonner, nor Calvo—should know of that hiding-place. More shyly than ever she had dreaded Henry she now dreaded Fitzgerald.

It was in the lane leading steeply down to Botolph's Wharf that she met Bonner the next evening, who came jauntily, having just drunk of Laura's lips at Calvo's, the universe looking now colour-of-rose in his eyes ; and long Bessie Ford meditated upon his face before she spoke, remembering Anne Boleyn's tale of his frailties ; but such a gaze of sincerity looked out of his great blue eyes, that she decided that, if he was wild in his nonage, he was

certainly honest ; and, saying not a word as to Anne, she appointed the next evening for the marriage, adding : " To-morrow morning after terce, prithee go thyself to Brother Bruno, appointing one hour after compline for the ceremony, and enjoining his secrecy. It is my will, Mark, since King Francis hath so shown himself my friend, that thou and thy wife, and the great wealth that thou hast, do fare with him to the land of France, if so be he be still of the same kindly mind to me and mine. And know, Mark Bonner, that I palm not off upon thee a wife tainted and touched, but one equal to any queen, boy, pure as snow ! And cherish her, boy, cherish, cherish her, for Jesu's sake—all thy life——" She turned her face away, her mouth working.

" But ", cried Mark, " Fitzgerald will himself come to France, and therefore thou also, good Bess ! "

" What art talking about, Mark ? "—with that air of scare and escape, as of one poised on the point of flying to hide.

" How ! wed'st thou not with Fitz at the same altar with me and Laura ? "

" Oh, thou talkest——" she faintly sighed.

" Why, Bess, I thought that Master Calvo had told thee all. Know, then, that Fitzgerald loves thee with no common passion, but even with heroic flame ; he wastes for thee ; faith, he perishes for thee. Oh, Bess, and anon he swears that thou lovest him, too, thinking of that night on the mountain-side of Maddox, and thy calling after him ; and anon he swears that thou hatest him, thinking of thy leap from Ormond Hall, and thy beating upon his face. Troth, sawest thou his big body sob, thou could'st not help but pity the great-hearted giant of a child that he is——"

" What, *sob*, say'st thou ? "

" Aye, and very care and sighing doth nip his cheek, good Bess ".

" My mother ! the pity on it ! "

" Dost pity him, Bess ? "

" Aye ".

" Then, will I tell him that thou, too, lovest——"

" Why, no ! Do but *dare*, and I hate thee for—Listen ! Hear me ! And bear what I now tell thee to this man . . ."

Then she related the tale of her shame, not hiding her high aim, but dwelling upon the act, the dogma, the ineffable shame . . . Never, she said, would she have this man address to her word or message more.

But Bonner kept the tale of shame in his own bosom, and that night told Fitz only that Bessie kicked against marriage, and must be won by force and strategy, though she loved.

" But will she not even once see me ? " asked Fitz.

" Not once ; and not Laura, not Calvo even, knows her hiding-place ".

" Why, pity me, then, boysie, for a wrecked soul ! "

" But, nay, Fitz, the case is not wholly so, I pledge thee. Bessie *loves* thee, my brave ; but is in a weird and crooked temper, which soon will pass. Laura has told me that she had even fears lately that Bess would be making away with herself—in the river——"

Fitzgerald paused in his swaying walk about the room, frowning into the soul of Bonner, crying " How ! make away with herself ? "—his mind somehow connecting these words with those of Anne's, sown like a weed within him : " Bessie Ford is the King's mistress . . ."

" I but say it, Fitz, to reveal thee the unevenness of her present temper ", said Bonner soothingly : " faith, lad, Bessie loves thee well ".

" Sayest thou ? "

" She loves thee ".

" Art sure and certain ? "

" Faith, Fitz, I swear it ".

" Oh, then, God bless thee, boy, for thy mouth ! And how looks and speaks she ? Hath she yet the little plait cocked off under the bulge of her shapely head, and the active turn of the little body when she speaks ? "

" Oh, 'tis ever the same neat Bess ".

Fitz lowered his voice. " But art sure they both escaped unscathed that King . . . ? "

" Oh, sure and certain, Fitz "—swinging a sheepish leg, averting always unpleasant things.

" An it be not so—— ! " went Fitzgerald, poking with his sword-point the air and imaginary King's-bowels, a savage *thoo !* issuing from between his teeth.

" 'Tis so, verily, Fitz "—from Bonner—" Faith, all is plain enough—a little force—a little strategy : to-morrow compline I wed Laura ; to-morrow morning to the good friar I give warning of a double marriage ; as Bess assists at my joining, *thou* appearest, and, will she, nill she, wed her. Thine arms once round her neck, I am certain that she is thine ".

In this Bonner spoke honestly, divining with good insight that the sight of Fitz's haggard face, and the sensation of his guarding arms, would hardly fail to overwhelm the gentle heart, assuage its alarms, and calm its smart of self-contempt ; and Fitz leapt at this suggestion, crying out : " Boy, I will ! . . . But sure and secret to work, boy ! Not a word to her ! "

" Why, no, not a word. Moreover, I shall not see her till the marriage ".

But he did : for the next sext he received a message from Calvo, bidding him come to the den to receive a new rendezvous with Bessie ; and at the den he learned that Laura had taken the whim to be married in velvet brodequins, a cap of crimson velvet, a surcoat of sarcenet : nor could all the eloquence in the world dissuade her. The woman of the house had undertaken to procure them for Bessie, who had come to the den on leaving Bonner the previous evening : but all this could not be done in a day.

At compline, therefore, Bessie and Bonner met once more in the Botolph Wharf lane, where Bessie told him that the marriage should be for the next night. But this he knew from Calvo : and now it was not clear why she had summoned him to meet her. She herself knew as little as he that the motive in her heart was to hear him speak, if for the last time, of Fitz.

And presently Bonner said : " Bess, I told Fitz of the King, and thee——"

" Prithee ", she answered with her look of scare and escape, " speak not to me of this man . . ."

" To see him now were to pity him, Bess ! "

" What hath he ? "

" Why, the poor man is blighted and undone : anon he paces the room with mutterings ; anon he tumbles and moans ; or he would be ripping his breast for very woe . . ."

" Is he so down ? "

" That is he. To see him were to pity him. Wilt see him ? "

" That will I never ".

" Oh, do ! "

" Did'st tell him explicitly of my fall, Mark ? "

" Why—yea. But that to him were all one, if *thee* he hath——"

" Said he that ? "

" Why, yea ".

" Art certain sure ? "

" Why, yea. Many, many times he said it ".

" Yet me he cannot have ", she cried out, " shall not have, as I loved, and love, him ! "

" There 'twas a Bess that spake ! " exclaimed Mark—" ' as I loved, and love, him '. Now hast thou openly betrayed thyself. And shall I tell thee a secret, Bess ?—he means to have thee, willy, nilly ".

" How ? "—she started.

" The morrow evening he will be even at the altar with ready ring to wed thee ! He swears it. Escape thou can'st not, Bess, unless thou would'st not see Laura wedded ! "

At this Bessie stood struck into stone ; made no answer ; until, suddenly covering her face, she let out : " Oh, he hath not the right ! he hath not the right ! "

But that night Bonner told Fitzgerald, with a just confidence in his divination, that Bessie had consented to be won by force—though perhaps unable to read the secret of her own consenting heart ; and Fitzgerald paced the chamber

like a beggar to whom the morrow will bring Golconda.

At about ten Bonner descended and went out, bearing a platter to the south end of King's Mews, almost opposite Charing Cross Tower, where a famous fat old woman, known through London as Madame Dessaulx, sold by rush-light at a booth both soused pig's-feet and cowheel-and-bacon ; but Fitz ate no supper that night : for, as Bonner was returning with his mess, a charre bearing a couple of ladies passed him under a lamp—ladies-of-honour returning to Bridewell from attendance upon the Queen, who, in turn, was at the Westminster Palace nursing the wounded King ; and one of them, Anne Boleyn, seeing three tip-staves marching westward, alighted and ran to them to whisper : " That youth yonder I charge for being mixed in the wounding of your King. Haste, arrest ! " So in a minute Bonner, in their clutches, was *en route* for the Marshalsea : for again Bessie was lost to Anne, and Anne reasoned that Bonner would know, and, were it by means of the rack, could be made to tell.

So Fitz awaited in vain his lost boy, until toward midnight he sallied out to hunt without clue ; and, roaming, he ransacked the night, now languid with weariness, now wild with distraction, only getting back to sleep when like an egg the East cracked, the yolk peeped.

During the day he visited the sage in vain : no boy there ; visited Bruno in the friary-parlour, and arranged for the double-marriage that night ; bought in the Jewry a ring for his bride's finger : but all languidly—with a boding ever heavy on his heart.

After vespers, strolling by the Marshalsea, he bethought him to enter, passed under the great arch, through the courtyard, to the room on the right called the Common Room, open to any stroller, whence issued a noise of voices : for there prisoners summarily-arrested were kept ; and, as he idled in, a blithe cry sobbed from Bonner . . .

A vast low room, partitioned into two parts by a railing forming a series of arches at its top, which top nearly

reached to the ceiling : everything else untooled and windowless stone, so that light oozed in quite dimly—from the door ; behind that railing six or seven prisoners, and before it some twenty people, gossips, relatives, warders, tipstaves. Three prisoners had their cheeks squeezed between the bars, shrieking ribaldries ; and all at once Bonner also was at the bars, ecstatic.

" Oh, boysie ", said Fitz with a sad smile, " how do I find thee ? a prisoner, but for thy nose ".

And Bonner : " Oh, Fitz, bitter have been my miseries ! Here have I been a night and a day ; and my wedding——"

" But how camest thou here ? "

" Little, God wot, know I of it. Some tipstaves pursued me, and the pig's-feet were spilled, the platter lost. Oh ! 'tis sorer this constraint than the wound I had at Maddox ! Yet, Fitz, I felt thou'dst come in time to deliver me——"

" Boysie, deliver thee !—and how ? "

" Can'st thou not, then ? Oh, say not that ! the hour of my wedding must be so wildly nigh now ! "

Fitz now gazed up, and round, and down, examining the room ; and suddenly whispered : " If thou standest on the shoulders of one of thy fellow-prisoners, thou couldst reach the railing-top, leap, and run. Try it !—consult 'em —bribe 'em "—putting all the four broad-pieces in his pouch into Bonner's hand. Then for ten minutes he strolled about ; till again he saw the agonised face at the railing, and went to hear it whisper : " They will not hear of it, not one ! for, say they, 'twill bring upon them the public stocks. Oh, Fitz, canst do *nothing* . . . ? "

Fitz pondered a long minute upon the boy with sorrowful eyes, smiling, while some voice in his interior seemed to scream at him : " If thou miss her to-night, Fitz—— ! "

But his heart was entrapped by this pretty fond boy ; and, shaking his head sorrowfully, he said : " Oh, boysie Bonner ! What a thing it is I do for thee ! "

Then, without hesitation, he walked away, and brought his palm down upon a warder's face.

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Upon which an outcry, a shouting of " Clubs ! ", and now eight hands were rushing him to the railing-gate, which opened to engulf and jangle again behind his back.

Making now a sign to Bonner, he waited some minutes, then stood at the obscurest end of the railing, when nobody was looking, and in a jiffy had the other hitched to his shoulders.

" Tell Bess why I came not ", he whispered up loud, " and run hard——"

Bonner's drop so startled the place, that he was half-way to the great gate before he was being chased ; and, fright and hope being wings to his pelting steps and flying hair, his escape was soon assured. But on, knowing himself late, he pelted ; and, as the west portal of the Crutched Church was separated only by the breadth of the Cellarer's-building from the convent-wall, whose west gate now lay open, he could see before him in dim perspective, as he doubled breathless into the grounds, a wedding-group waiting in there at the nave-altar.

For there, sitting back on the credence-table, book in hand, was Brother Bruno, thick, looking still more wide-spread in rochet and stole ; and there the sacrist by the bride ; and there the brow of Calvo bulging out of his skull cap ; and Bessie in her plain attire, but tidied ; and the resplendent bride. . . .

Never sun so bright as Laura that night in the eyes of Bessie Ford ! never empress so dressed in loveliness ! so that Bonner, on entering, seemed too mean to be her menial.

Pelting, panting, he came ; and, hearing that foot-fall, Bessie looked round in a panic, expecting *another* with it . . . Missing it, her brain dizzied, swooned in a rayless universe ; and still, as the ceremony went forward, pallid as the dead she expected that foot-fall with panic—perhaps with hope . . .

But when at last she saw Laura verily wedded wife before her eyes, then she forgot herself, Fitzgerald, and all ; and falling to the ground, she grasped Laura round the legs, wailing " *O Laura !* ", her mouth-muscles stretched tense, with streaming tears.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE FLEET

They parted—ne'er to meet again !
And never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining.

Coleridge.

Wedded Laura went heavy-veiled with her husband in a charre to a lodging beyond the city-wall hard by St. Mary Spittal ; and Bessie paced home in dark lonesomeness to the watchman's place by Billingsgate—Bonner, in his haste and heat, having forgotten to mention to her the reason of Fitzgerald's absence . . . the name even of Fitz . . .

And that night there dawned upon her heart, for the first time, a pernicious suspicion . . . that in the course of time she would become a mother . . . a suspicion soon confirmed . . .

Meanwhile, Fitzgerald had been hailed before the Southwark Justice, indicted with " striking ", had got a sentence of two hours in the stocks, and had sat big before the prison-gate, in ignominy, in the sun's glare—he, Garrett Oge of Kildare.

Thence he went direct to Calvo, who was jocund on the subject of the late marriage, promising that his should be the next ; and, although as to Bessie's place of abode he could say nothing, he had his plan.

" Her will ", he said, " is that the married couple shall sail hence with Francis of France ; and, as she knows that I know in what lodging Francis abides, she will come to me one night to be told : and on that night I shall tell her to come the next night, when Bruno shall be here with book and cross, and yourself also. Never fear, all will be well ".

And Fitz : " Now, may God bless you, Master Alchymist, for that word ! "

" Meantime ", observed Calvo, " I feel certain that she lurks in some nook round about Billingsgate, and 'twere no hurt if you searched and run her to earth. What is wrong with her I cannot fancy ".

All this time Calvo had communicated no syllable to Francis of his discovery, by the stars, of the sisters : for the fact that Laura was under his roof had a sublunar look, and he cherished a vain and stubborn reluctance to be detected in charlatanry by Francis, his ancient dupe : so Francis, meanwhile, waiting for Calvo's answer, ceased not from roaming London through the night, mostly alone, in the neighbourhood of the river, though he divined that at this time his life must be in considerable danger. At this time, too, all through the East-river region, Fitz roamed by night, seeking.

Once, having made her way with elaborate stealths to the married pair's place, Bessie heard that earlier in the night Fitzgerald had been there : and she leapt affrighted to her feet, shying now at the mere sound of his name.

Fitzgerald, indeed, was now too late : for the material reason of motherhood, added to the moral of shame, was not less overwhelming than fate itself . . .

Once, when she had stolen from her lodging about midnight to crouch, and pore, and gloat at what was now to her a grog-shop spot—those bearded beams beneath Botolph's Wharf—he, on her way home, glimpsed her from afar, and gave chase ; but she bolted, and slipped into a doorway, leaving him at sea.

Three days after which she came to Calvo by night to discover Francis ; but he pretended to have mislaid the paper on which he had written the address, appointed two nights thence for a second coming, and on that appointed night the trap of marriage was set for her.

But on that night, as she was coming nigh London Bridge from the east, she saw across the street in the off-shine of a lamp that large form which she loved, he then entering the Bridge on its west side : and, as though flying

from Golgotha, she was gone—instinctively eastward toward her lodging near the shipping, he calling piteously after her.

" Oh, this time I have you, Bess—this time, by God ! " he groaned with ground teeth, an unhealed gash in the leg mingling a limping with his gait.

Past St. Magnus' Church she sped, pelted down some steps to a lower street at the back of Botolph's Wharf, and, a hundred feet beyond the Wharf, conscious that his footsteps grew upon her, flew down a lane to the right, and into an open yard-gate there ; then, crazy with terrors, hearing his feet striking nigh, instantly hied out again, hissing : " Christ ! how this man is for following me . . . ! "

Now afresh he saw her, and passionately called, she running direct upon the river where it washed a warehouse flush, and must have been caught—for no alley opened eastward—had she been unwitted by her instinct of reaching home ; but, an opening westward presenting itself, into this she darted, running, at the back of Botolph's Wharf, back toward London Bridge.

Now, between the Wharf and the Bridge there lay a court, closed north and south, broken into a higher and a lower level by three steps : and she, not knowing that it was a *cul-de-sac*, rushed into it, then doubled up the steps, northward. As she shocked against the blind wall, she became conscious that he also had entered the court, but had doubled southward : and there against the stones she cringed, hidden in gloom, still but for her labouring breast, ignorant that the south end was blind likewise. But in some seconds she heard his echoes turn, heard them coming, heard him mumble some oath or prayer, as his feet stumbled up the three steps toward her ; and now distraction pressed her, and she ran to meet him, for to stand there would have been to rend her heart in a shriek.

Close to the wall on her right she ran, in the wild hope of dashing past him ; but her flight brought her into impact with a door swung open ; and, halting, she bolted into a passage, ran, stumbled, fell.

Here was a smell of tar and ropes ; westward a doorway framed lamplight ; and stumbling her impassioned way among kegs, coils, nets, and tackle, she came out into a street, and saw St. Magnus near.

Now again she ran, with hope, always westward, past the church, the Bridge, to the back of Fishmonger's Hall; and here, as she doubled riverward for Cold Harbour, once more her ear caught the echoing steps, and that lamentable calling.

" *This man* . . . " she went, their love now touched with venom, rather resembling hate : for why, he thought, did she not face and brave him, with yea or nay ? why not guess that, were she shame clad in rags, still she was she to him ? And why, she thought, did he not guess that she *could* not face and brave him with nay ; and that it was for *his* sake . . . ?

Round the curve of strand called Cold Harbour she ran, came at its further end upon a cyclopean wall running north-and-south, where the Steel Yard started, and here, though death were at her, she could run no more. Resting her forehead on a ledge of the wall, which broadened at its bottom, she commenced to vomit, with coughs and retches of nausea ; till her eyes, stretched sideways with a rabbit's watchfulness, saw the long shadow of his breast dash over the strand into the river ; and, with a groan, she was gone, hugging the glooms, some kind of diffused light being in the night from a moon hiding behind clouds, but the air sombrous, brown.

Past the Steel Yard, westward down a steep street of " pavers " on which the feet slipped, to The Cranes she raced, he, with gore now guttering down his left leg, hunting her ; nor was she more than twenty yards before him when he saw her, at the bottom of this street, bolt riverward once more along the east bank of the little stream which flowed along the west wall of The Cranes toward Broken Wharf ; and when, at that moment, two river-men and a watchman ran into his path, with a " What ho, for a

disturber of the King's peace ! ", such a tempest of energy scattered them, that in some seconds he was running afresh.

After The Cranes, whose crane-arms stretched sheer over deepish river, the river had strand all along by Broken Wharf to Queen Hythe, where the buildings again bluffed into the water, till one came to Baynard Castle and the Fleet, where again was a little strand : so, in running down toward Broken Wharf, he heard the sound of her buskins run on boards down there, and, on himself coming out on the shore, could discern her twisting northward at Queen Hythe, her passage there along the river being blocked ; and now, losing both her and her footfalls, for very breathlessness he slowed his pace, inhaling as it were through his pores, realising that her wind was as good as his, her grit as tough.

So up by Queen Hythe he, too, raced, but did not see her : for she with a strange fascination, hoping perhaps for some wharf such as Botolph's below which to flee, had once more bolted riverward, to run until, under the roundel-towers of Baynard Castle, she dashed out upon a narrow strand ; but she had hardly run five yards along this when she stopped with a cry : for before her the Fleet, washing the west wall of the Castle, dashed down here to its meeting with the Thames. She had run into a trap.

So back now she ran, and, as she ran, with a distraction now ecstatic, she saw him coming ; and back again she doubled toward the Fleet some few feet, then back again toward him some few feet, then back again toward the Fleet, with a steady heat. And now, all suddenly, a fear pierced him, and " Stop ! I hold . . . ! " he howled—too late : deaf and deadly now she dashed, she plunged, the plash shouted ; and some half-minute afterwards he also plashed after her.

They were swept into the near main-stream, where, after some flounderings, Fitzgerald found her out, as her head once leapt up from the depth ; but even in that drowsing in which the half-drowned are believed to browse on

dreams Bessie fought hard for death, wrestling with him with venom ; and when at last he rose with her on the shore in front of Baynard Castle, he had in him a consciousness that she was dead.

Up he emerged from the drench, a steady murmur of " Oh-h-h-h . . . " bursting through his bubbling, Bessie burdening his left breast, caught at last ; and since he could bear her no farther, he was about to lay her down in the embrasure of the castle-portal, when he felt his back touched, and a high voice cried : " La, rascal, draw for thy life . . . ! " : for Francis, straying down here, had seen by peering the face of his little friend, but did not perceive that she was dead, nor was aware of any relation between Fitzgerald and her.

On which Fitzgerald drew, hesitated, dashed with his dead to the arch, ran out anew, and fought with a mind all benumbed, orbless, not knowing why he fought, nor whom, fancying only that somebody wanted to rob her from him : and the sword was his habit.

But for that agile edge of Francis Fitzgerald was no match that night : he made, after some passes, a rash disengagement-over-the-arm, which Francis negligently parried in prime ; and " Thy chance, man—kill ", hissed Fitz, as Francis ran him through the heart.

Then, as the red rapier dropped back to scabbard, Francis ran to the portal, peered over her on his knees, noted that she lay dead.

And there a long time he sat by her, pondering it ; then, having taken out the State-papers from the old chamberlain's-pouch on her hip, bore her through a desert London to London Bridge and Calvo's den.

There, on the settee lately brought down for Calvo's bed, they laid her out ; and Calvo, kneeling to her with the anguished jaw of grief, at last let his forehead drop upon her breast, and abandoned himself to a sobbing, within which the words " my love " were heard by the King.

Then Brother Bruno, come with book and cross to wed

her, was sent away ; and during soundless hours they two sat, king and alchymist, gloating over her, the horn-lanthorn's glimmer darkling at her head ; until the King whispered : " 'Tis clear you knew her, Signior ".

Calvo bowed assent.

" You told me not that ".

" Because I would not, Sire ". And there was silence anew.

Then Calvo, raising his bleared red eyes, breathed : " But where found you her ? "

" In the arms of a man—a martialist named Fitzgerald, one of her sister's seekers, whom I killed ".

" Killed ! But he is Bessie's lover ; and Bessie, I'll swear, was taken with him, too ".

" Then here is tragedy, Signior, fourfold : for I who loved her slew her lover ".

" Was she dead when you met him ? "

" Dead in his arms ".

" Then—'tis strange. She must have run from him into the river. And if she did this, then, what you told me, Sire, of an outrage by Henry of England upon her is most true. Aye, here—*here*—was her motive ! "

" Oh, outrage there *was* ; I never doubted it ".

Calvo lifted his fist.

After some minutes he turned upon the King an earnest gaze : " And, King Francis, in the name of God and of Chivalry, will you let this crime pass unavenged ?—you, a great King ? "

" Not unavenged, I swear, Signior. Wait, you shall see ".

They spoke low, and long silences followed few words, while the night turned old, and the ooze from her dripped slow, ticking, tolling, having soaked into the straw under her, and through it. The sage had taken two tapers from a table-drawer to stick them, lit, in a niche near her : and upon her, stooping over on stools, the two men pored, trying ever to fathom, but ever baffled, her learned eternal eyelids and drowsing brow.

The stillness was heavy there in the depth of the river . . .

Calvo muttered low : " A spirit, I thought, of uncommon chemistry . . . "

And Francis : " No hero braver, friend ; no, never breast of warrior throbbed stronger . . . Yet she appears to have been a simple country-girl . . . If the country-girls of England are like this, England anon must stand forth as the glory of Christendom ".

And Calvo : " Many in England are like her, methinks, yet not she : *she* was rare ".

She was in no way disfigured ; her eyelids vaulted ; she seemed taller ; neither smiling nor angry ; her hands resting on her chest, stretched in regal sleep. Regal—though her broken buskins were there to see, and the little string of rowan-tree berries round her throat.

It was near day-break when Calvo, with his lips compressed, said : " Ah ! I will settle my score with Henry of England yet ! "

" Ah ? " said Francis.

" I will sit me down, Sire, and write this man a letter frankly expressed, were I thereby to resign all—elaboratory, patronage, head, and all ".

" Under what patronage bide you at present, Signior ? "

" Under my Lord Wolsey's, Sire ".

" La—rotten ! Wolsey will fall—soon, sir. Little malice bear I that great man, yet fall he must whose greatness now hangs upon the friendship of Spain and Pope with England. Take my hint, Signior : I have this night resolved to nip that friendship at any sacrifice, by winning the alliance of my brother of Spain ; and I have here papers, taken from that girl's hip-pouch, which will furnish the very blade I need to the hilt of my intent. La ! trust not to Wolsey, man ! "

" Understand I rightly your Majesty to hint me offer of herbergage in French land ? "

" Most heartily, if you will ".

" Heartily I thank your Majesty. The morrow night, after the burial of this martyr, I were ready to start ".

" And I ! But her Laura ? "

" Laura, Sire, is wedded wife—to a youth chosen for her by Bessie : and, as it was the defunct's will that they should sail with you to France—they having now a fortune of twenty thousand rose-nobles—if to this you consent, Sire——"

" La, consent ! why, even gladly. But where, then, is this wedded pair ? "

" I know where, Sire ".

" You know all, Signior . . . Now, I put you a query frankly, Calvo, as man to man : Were you verily led to the acquaintance of these maidens by any aid of thy star-gazing, yea or nay ? "

" Nay, Sire. Lie to you I could not in the presence of that sainted dead. Nay, not by any aid of the stars, Sire. O, King Francis, I tell you, the stars grant not any guidance to us mortal men. To the mariner's boat the Pole-star is a compass, and upon the Arab rambler brooding alone by the lonesome pool Boötes pours a soothing ; but upon the generations that raging gaze, and gazing perish, in this deep of Time they wink their lidless eyes, and seem to will to tell, yet tell not. Never a word, sir—never one. Their shout adown the interspace—if they shout—is whiffed in the wind of the trillion-distanced interval, and scarce a wistful echo, as of sea-shell whisperings, reaches to cheat the ear with witching sweet. Oh, Sire, look but upon this poor dead, and ask me Why, or wither your eyeballs with sky-ward blinking, asking why, or call to the North-wind, whose tongue doth stutter to utter it, but is dumb, and ask it why : answer anywhere is none ; and, for himself, poor Mauro Calvo begins to feel that we beat in vain against these prison-walls. Dark, yes, dark : yet under the shadow of His Wing shall be our refuge for ever . . . Well, well . . . Ah, well . . . Faith, I believe 'tis broad day above already . . . "

He wiped a moisture from his toiled eyes : and Francis, having bent to lay his mouth upon Bessie's brow, appointed a meeting for the evening, and went away.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE CIRCLES SPREAD

Ah, mark that potter's wheel—that metaphor.
Browning.

Un son nous fait désirer celui qui doit lui répondre, et quand le second rétentit, il rappelle celui qui vient de nous échapper.
Madame de Staël.

Some four weeks afterwards the forehead of Henry of England was wrinkled, like that of a man driven into a corner, hemmed-in by enemies, who has no resource but to combat or sink. The influence of Bessie Ford and her destiny had caught and gripped him, the tangles of her coils now about him with strangling drag, and as he had not spared, so he hoped for no sparing. Accordingly, his heart hardened : and with the outward calamity of his surroundings was mixed an inward condition of rancour, each of these reacting to increase and exasperate the other.

That day as ever he was up with the sun : and as he stood between two gentlemen-of-the-bedchamber, who kneeled with buckling and with buttoning, the Lord Chamberlain was admitted with a missive from the High Sheriff of Norfolk, which announced that the recent riots in the Eastern counties had raged out beyond bounds, and bore now the name of Insurrection, a regiment of the rioters having filled King's Lynn and Fakenham with fire and sword.

To go " Ha ! " royally quenches no conflagration : and Henry swaggered aggressively to levée with a brand on his brow, destined to grow redder that day.

He sat in a square bare oak-chamber on a chair-throne canopied in red with Utrecht velvet, in his train standing Gardiner, Norfolk, Sir Thomas Lovell, a scattering of

yeoman-guards ; and presently at the door a calling : " His Grace the Bishop of Bayonne : to have audience ! "

Henry started, knowing that the weekly *paquebot* from Calais had reached Dover the previous noon ; and, as Du Ballay, his face lit up, advanced with homages, said Henry bluffly : " Well, my Lord Bishop, and what of your master's news ? "—though with an underlook of care and fear.

" I bear no letters on this occasion for Your Grace——"

" Well, my Lord Bishop, out with it, out with it, man, for my day is short. What news ? "

" I have instructions to acquaint Your Grace that——"

" Aye, ' instructions to acquaint '—then, acquaint him straightway, and have it off thy stomach, man ! "

" That the King of France and the Emperor Charles have signed a Convention of Alliance at Bagnères de Luchon——"

" Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! my good friends and brothers of France and Spain ! *I*'ll ally them, by the Splendour— ! I say, you, Norfolk, where the pestilence is Wolsey ? "

" At the White Hall, Sire ".

" Have him here, have him here ! "

Henry sprang up, began to leg and perambulate : with rough fans vented the breath from his nostrils that day.

But Wolsey, after matins, had taken horse for Hampton, nor was it until two hours after the King's nooning that he came ; and while Henry awaited him, the door-usher called : " The Condé Ferondo of Spain : to have audience ! "—the Spanish Ambassador, bearer to Henry of " letters " from Charles.

A scathing letter : Charles declaring openly that he had been shown Henry's letter to Wolsey containing that word " Divorce ", and the Alvarada and Katherine documents, taken from the body of Bessie Ford by Francis ; he fulminated threats that read like threats of war ; and he fulminated the announcement that an Order in Council had

already been promulgated for inhibiting the English wool-trade with Flanders.

Here was what touched deep. And the news, new to Henry, had six days since been conjectured in the City, where just the suspicion of this thing had created panic : for laden ships had sailed back unladen ; expected ships had not come in ; and at that very moment a deputation of aldermen wending westward was swelling, as it advanced, to a mob that was tramping upon the palace.

Henry's redness deepened, as he read. And " Ha ! " he said, and " Ha ! ", but should have said " He ! "

Then at last came Wolsey trotting to the Presence ; and " My lord, hast heard the news ? " asked Henry.

" Sire, I have had letters . . . Sire, Sire . . . "

" Well, my lord, you must throw your Spain over ! I mean to ruffle it with this Charles, by God ! Mark me, my lord, no paltering ! "—stalking to and fro feverishly, settling his elbows in his sleeves.

" Sire, what would you do ? "

" Divorce ! Divorce ! By Heaven's light, my lord, I'm a dangerous man to drive into a corner ! Divorce ! He defies me, I defy him ! And I wager you my throne that the mere serious threat of it, backed by the Pope's sanction, shatters this League to fragments : Henry for ever, by Heaven ! "

" But the Pope's sanction, Sire ? That were difficult, impossible now, to get, he having the strength of Charles with Francis at his back ".

" Wolsey, Wolsey, you palter ! Believe me, you palter, man ! By Heaven, 'tis an ill sign when a man palters ! Pope's sanction, quotha ? Have I not it already, secretly given, locked fast in yon cabinet ? "

(Clement VII had, in truth, under pressure of some other political juncture, given a virtual consent to the divorce four months before).

But before Wolsey could answer, Thomas Howard, with a scared face, looked in, craved to speak—came with the

hot news of the advancing mob . . . And now Henry : " Let the tykes come ! Ha ! there lies worse in store for them than this ! My Lord Wolsey, summon me a Council ! And, without delay, call me a Parliament ! "

Now he strode from the chamber, and was crossing a corridor, when one ran to him with a letter, which, as it bore the seal of Francis, he broke eagerly open : but it was from Mauro Calvo.

Calvo wrote freely, heading his letter with the words :

" Concerning Bessie Ford ".

" . . . Thou God-forsaken wretch . . . This the stars say concerning you . . . Well, you believe not in stars, and you are right—verily, they tell us nothing. Yet *inner* twinklings of light there are by which the wise be not altogether deprived of horoscope and augury. And hear this curse and prophecy of Mauro Calvo against thee . . . thou shalt be hunted by the Avengers of Blood through all thy corrupted years . . . from crime to crime shalt thou advance . . . the fair promise of thy life shall turn to a shame of bloated and ignominious misery . . . them thou lovest shall hate thee, and in turn be hated of thee . . . thou shalt stir in the night and curse God every hour, and every hour be cursed by Him . . . thou shalt die of rottenness. . . . "

As Henry crushed the letter in his hand, the palace was surrounded by a roar.

But he was not done with the slaps of fate that day. By far the most momentous came when a Papal Legate, just arrived from France, and ushered in by Wolsey, presented to the King a letter—from Clement.

Under pressure of Charles, Clement now made a complete *volte face* : for no reason, he wrote, could he countenance Divorce, were he even driven to employ in threat such words as Interdict and Excommunication : though he might consent to issue a Commission to try the case . . .

Seeing himself thus beset at every point, Henry, pricked to ecstasy by the sting of the moment, now broke into fury, and, as he vexedly strode about, poured forth a foam of invective . . .

" The Pope ! Oh, just, impartial, and kind Father of Christendom ! Not trembling in his holy aloofness at the becks and grins of Charles of Spain ! Oh, no ! The Pope, eh ? God ! and do I bow and cringe to this ? I ? Oh, so ? I'll pitch my crown into the nearest gargoyle-gutter first ! You hear me, Wolsey ? You, sirrah, Pope's-legate, or whate'er you name yourself, you hear me ? Then, bear me, you two, witness to the four winds of Christendom : I *defy* the Pope. . . . "

Now for the first time since the murder of the Messiah had such words, in such tone, been uttered by a tongue.

King Henry of England stamped his foot ; and with that stamp Mediæval Europe ceased ; and modern Europe sprang.

For the way of things is so, and by " footsteps not known " the Power steps without stay, and is patient.

Or as a modern, rising in a high instant to prophetic strain, has written :

> He strictly drifts,
> and tillerless guides,
> an Argonaut blind,
> His bark.

END